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C0647 – December 20, 2006 – Ex 25:10-22, 37:1-9 – The Ark Of The Covenant

B. The Furniture (25:10-40)

Now that we've seen the list of materials let's look at the first piece of furniture to be constructed after the model Moses saw on Mt Sinai and its significance.

1. The Ark of the Covenant (25:10-22)

The Ark of the Covenant is mentioned first because it is the most important piece of furniture in the Tabernacle.

Exodus 25:10-22 They shall construct an ark of acacia wood two and a half cubits long, and one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits high.

¹¹ “You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and you shall make a gold molding around it.

¹² “You shall cast four gold rings for it and fasten them on its four feet, and two rings shall be on 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 “You shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry the ark with them.

¹⁵ “The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be removed from it.

¹⁶ “You shall put into the ark the testimony which I shall give you.

17 “You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide.

18 “You shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat.

19 “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.

20 “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.

21 “You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you.

22 “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.

What is the Ark? The Hebrew word for Ark is not the same word used of Noah’s ark. This Hebrew word means “chest” (2 Kgs 12:9, 10) or “coffin” (Gn 50:26). The **ark** was a chest made of **acacia wood** overlaid **inside and out** with **pure gold**. On each corner at the foot was placed a **gold ring**. Two poles made of **acacia wood** were overlaid with **gold** and permanently placed through the **rings on the ark** so they could carry it without touching it. The ark was never to be touched by human hands and when it was it would strike you dead. Thus, the poles **remained** in the rings permanently. The top or lid of the **ark** was a solid piece of **pure gold** out of which were **hammered** two cherubs on top (Exod 37:7, 8). The cherubim faced one another and their wings **spread upward**. Just above their outstretched wings was the throne of Yahweh.

1 Chronicles 13:6 to bring up from there the ark of God, the LORD who is enthroned *above* the cherubim, where His name is called.

Psalms 99:1 The LORD reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned *above* the cherubim, let the earth shake!

It was from this throne above and between the cherubim that Yahweh spoke to Moses (Nm 7:89).¹ The surface of the lid was called the “mercy” or

“atonement” seat (*kipproeth*). In a minute we will return to the meaning and significance of the “atonement seat”.

The Temple Institute in Jerusalem which has reconstructed many of the Temple articles in accordance with the best biblical research and by some of the world’s finest craftsmen. The dimensions of the **ark** are given in verse 10, **two and a half cubits long**, that is ~45inches (i.e. ~3 feet 9 inches, 44.29inches exactly) **and one and a half cubits wide**, that is ~27inches (i.e. ~2 feet three inches, 26.57inches exactly), **and one and a half cubits high**, that is ~27 inches which is the same as the width.

What are the Names of the Ark? This chest or coffin has several names in Scripture. It is known as the Ark of the Covenant (Josh 3:6), the Ark of God (1Sa 3:3), the Ark of the Lord (Josh 4:5), the Ark of God’s strength (2Ch 6:41; Ps 132:8), the Ark of the Covenant of God (Judg 20:27), the Ark of the God of Israel (1 Sam 6:3), the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord (Nu 10:33), the Ark of the Testimony (Ex 30:6; Nu 7:89), and the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of all the earth (Josh 3:11).ⁱⁱ Most commonly we refer to it as the Ark of the Covenant but each title expresses some different aspect of the Ark.

What are the Contents of the Ark? Three things were placed in the Ark of the Covenant (Heb 9:4). First, the two tablets of the testimony (Exod 25:16). This was the Ten Commandments.ⁱⁱⁱ Second, a golden pot of manna, the miraculous food provided by God in the wilderness (Ex 16:33). Third, Aaron’s rod that budded.^{iv}

What is the Significance of the Ark? This most important aspect of the ark is discovering its significance. As we already said the top or lid of the Ark was called the “mercy” or “atonement seat”. This seat was made of solid gold and had two cherubs atop it with wings spread upward. YHWH was enthroned above the cherubim. Each year on the Day of Atonement (Heb = *Yom Kippur*) the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies and sprinkle blood on the atonement seat and the eastern face of the ark. This Hebrew word for the atonement seat is *kiporet*, a derivative of the Hebrew word *kipper*, which means “to atone”.

There are two factors that have led to a confusion of atonement. First, its theological. In systematic theologies “atonement” is often applied to the whole

work of Christ on the cross including redemption, reconciliation and propitiation. This is completely inaccurate. I have found on numerous occasions that we have filled biblical words with non-biblical meanings and this has led to believers not being able to read and understand the Bible. For example, most people think the biblical word “saved” means a person is going to heaven rather than hell. Biblically this use is only found 7% of the time in the OT and just over 50% of the time in the NT. The meaning of the word is much broader than this but by thinking in terms of heaven and hell we often can’t be blinded to understanding many passages which condition salvation on confession or enduring to the end, etc...rather than faith alone. This just shows that although we are using a biblical word we have filled it with a non-biblical meaning or have limited its semantic domain. “Eternal life” is another biblical phrase that is more often than not misunderstood. It is thought that the Bible teaches only that a person either possesses or does not possess eternal life, much like the word “saved”, either you’re saved or not! Either you have eternal life or not! But if we limit our understanding of eternal life to this meaning we will be completely unable to understand scores of passages that mention “eternal life”. In the Bible “eternal life” has three dimensions; a present possession, a present enjoyment and a future enjoyment. The bottom line is that I have found that Christians today are not even able to speak in biblical language with one another without being confused. For example, if I stood up here and opened with prayer saying “Heavenly Father, I pray that you would save me, in Jesus name I pray. Amen.” Christians would shudder and think, “The pastor is not even saved!” However, this is a perfectly biblical prayer for a genuine believer to pray. The issue is what “save” means. And although every Christian has been saved from the penalty of sin every believer still needs to be saved from the power of sin. So, the prayer “Save me” is a perfectly biblical prayer for a believer. Now, when we come to the word “atonement” we have a similar problem. Systematic theologies fill the biblical word with non-biblical meaning and this has led to confusion and sloppiness. We have to re-train ourselves not only to use the biblical word but also the biblical definitions. Systematic theologies are notorious for this sloppiness.

The second factor that has led to confusion regarding atonement is the lexical meaning of the OT *kipper* and its derivatives. Older Hebrew lexicons wrongly list “cover” as the primary meaning. Recently this has been exposed as a dead wrong. For example, Harris, Archer and Waltke in their Theological

Dictionary of Old Testament Words say, “The root *kāpar* is used some 150 times. It has been much discussed. There is an equivalent Arabic root meaning “cover,” or “conceal.” On the strength of this connection it has been supposed that the Hebrew word means “to cover over sin” and thus pacify the deity, making an atonement (so BDB). It has been suggested that the OT ritual symbolized a covering over of sin until it was dealt with in fact by the atonement of Christ. There is, however, very little evidence for this view. The connection of the Arabic word is weak and the Hebrew root is not used to mean ‘cover.’” Allen Ross says “For example, one hears it being taught that sins in the Old Testament were never fully forgiven or atoned, but merely covered over as a temporary measure. But Scripture says that atonement was made and they were forgiven”^v (e.g. Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7; 19:22; Num 15:25, 28). The issue really comes down to what the Hebrew word “atone” means and what kind of “forgiveness” they enjoyed (positional or experiential, inner or outer). In addition, Ezekiel 40-48 and other passages (e.g. Jer 33:17-23; Isa 56:6-7; 60:7; 66:20-21; Zech 14:16-21; Hag 2:7; Mal 1:11) say that sacrifices will be offered again in the future Millennial Temple and that these future sacrifices are for “atonement” (Ezek 43:20, 26; 45:15, 17, 20). This seems like heresy to many considering the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. Certainly any future sacrifices cannot atone for sin. However, this is what the text says. The Bible says both Mosaic sacrifices and Millennial sacrifices atone for and forgive sin. The conclusion is inescapable: whatever purpose the Mosaic sacrifices served must also be the purpose of the Millennial sacrifices. The only difference is OT sacrifices happened before the cross and Millennial sacrifices will happen after the cross. The key then is discovering their actual purpose. What did atonement accomplish in the OT and what kind of forgiveness took place through sacrifice? What is the purpose of sacrifices that provide atonement in the Millennial Kingdom? How does this harmonize with the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ? Two factors help us understand the Mosaic and Millennial sacrifices. First, recent lexical studies of the Hebrew word “atonement” and second, dispensational considerations.

Rather than dealing exclusively with the once-a-year sprinkling of blood on the atonement seat of the Ark of the Covenant our discussion will refer to “atonement” in general. There are three basic views of atonement in the OT. First, one view states that the Hebrew word *kipper* is derived from the Arabic

kapara and means “to cover”. The blood sacrifices covered the offerer’s sin. This view emphasizes that the sacrifices were directed sinward.

Chart Illustrating Different Views of Atonement

	View 1	View 2	View 3
Arabic	<i>kapara</i>	<i>kopper</i>	
Akkadian			<i>kuppuru</i>
Hebrew	<i>kipper</i>	<i>kipper</i>	<i>kipper</i>
Meaning	“to cover”	“to propitiate”	“to cleanse”
	Blood sacrifices covered Israel’s sin	Blood sacrifices satisfied God	Blood sacrifices ritually cleansed Israel
Direction	sinward	Godward	manward or objectward

Second, another view states that the Hebrew word *kipper* is derived from the Arabic *kopper*, the noun form of the word above, and means “to propitiate” or “satisfy”. The blood sacrifices satisfied God. This view emphasizes that the sacrifices were directed Godward.

Third, recent studies in lexicography reveal that neither of the previous views is correct. It has been discovered that the Hebrew word *kipper* is not derived from an Arabic word but from the Akkadian *kuppuru* and means “to purify” “to cleanse”. The blood sacrifices temporarily cleansed or purified two things:

1. people who become ritually impure because of sin or impurities (Exod 30:15, 16; **Lev 1:4**; 4:20; **12:8**; 14:18-20, 29, 31; 15:30; **Numb 8:21**). And the nation corporately (**Lev 16:16, 24**)
2. sacred objects used in worship which become ritually impure due to the sins of the people (e.g. the altar, Ex 29:36; **Lev 8:15; 16:18-19**)^{vi}

Importantly, in the OT “atonement” is never directed toward God or sin but always people or sacred objects that have sinned or become impure. The OT distinguishes between sin and impurity (Lev 16:16). For example, a person or object could become impure by simply touching a dead body, giving birth, leprosy, or discharging any bodily emission. These were not sin but did cause the person to be in a state of ritual impurity and they would have to be

atoned for in order to worship in the visible presence of Shechinah and dwell in the camp of the Israelites. Therefore, the sacrifices did not propitiate God or cover sin. Rather, they ritually cleansed (atoned for) the person or the object so they could worship in the visible presence of Shechinah Glory. The key to understanding animal sacrifices is Shechinah. Whenever Shechinah is present in the midst of sinful men animal sacrifices are required for outer experiential cleansing, ritual purification.^{vii} Therefore, animal sacrifices are required only during two periods of biblical history.

1. During the Tabernacle and 1st Temple Period (Exod 40:35-Ezek 10:18)
2. During the Millennial Temple Period (Ezek 43:4).

These are the only two periods when Shechinah dwells in the midst of sinful men and these are the only two periods when animal sacrifices are required. Therefore, because man is sinful and a holy God was dwelling in their midst He required animal sacrifices for outer ritual cleansing. This would enable them to worship in God's visible presence. This outer cleansing through animal sacrifice only cleansed the flesh (Heb 9:13) and did not cleanse their consciences (Heb 9:9, 14). Nor did it do away with the fact that God still required that men confess their sins in order to enjoy inner cleansing and worship Him in spirit and truth (e.g. Ps 51:2). Thus, there are two dimensions of experiential cleansing during these two time periods; outer cleansing and inner cleansing. During the Church age there is only one dimension of experiential cleansing: inner cleansing by way of confession (1 John 1:7-9). The reason is because Shechinah Glory is not dwelling in our midst. So, the first purpose of animal sacrifices is to temporarily cleanse people who become ritually impure so they can worship in the presence of Shechinah.

Second, impurity could be transferred from sinful people to the sacred objects of the tabernacle/temple (e.g. the altar). These defiled objects had to be ritually cleansed in order to serve in worship of the visible Shechinah Glory. God required that blood sacrifices be offered in order to temporarily cleanse these objects.

As you can see, the animal sacrifices had nothing to do with how a man could be positionally clean before God. In every dispensation a man becomes positionally clean through faith alone. At the moment of faith alone the

believer is positionally forgiven on the basis of Christ's sacrifice. If you believed before the cross then forgiveness was anticipatory of Christ's sacrifice. If you believed after the cross forgiveness looks back to Christ's sacrifice. All are positionally cleansed at the moment of faith alone on the basis of Christ's sacrifice. These animal sacrifices operated in a different sphere. They had to do with outer experiential cleansing because of Shechinah's presence.

Let's look at an OT example to more fully understand. David was justified by faith alone (Rom 4:5ff). When David was a boy he was a shepherd who worked in the fields. If David sinned in the field (overt or covert) he could confess his sin(s) (e.g. Ps 51:2) and be immediately he would be inwardly cleansed so he could continue to worship God in spirit and truth out in the field. He did not have to run to the temple and offer sacrifice in order to be restored to fellowship with God. However, when David went to Jerusalem to the Temple to worship God he would have to have his sin(s) atoned for so he could be ritually cleansed (externally holy) in the presence of Shechinah.

Positional Cleansing	Faith alone	
Experiential Cleansing	Outer	Animal sacrifice
	Inner	Confession

So, the bottom line is that the animal sacrifices atoned for the people and made them ceremonially clean so they could remain in the midst of Shechinah Glory who dwelled in the tabernacle/temple. These sacrifices did not do away with their need to confess their sin but supplemented it. Whenever Shechinah Glory is dwelling in the midst of sinful man both outer and inner experiential cleansing must take place. Thus, animal sacrifices serve the same purpose under the Mosaic Law as they do under Millennial Law. They provide ritual cleansing due to Shechinah's presence among sinful men. In the Millennium an increased measure of holiness will extend to all of Jerusalem because of the visible presence of the Glorified Lord Jesus Christ. This is the only view that does justice to the OT meaning of atonement and interprets Millennial Sacrifice passages in a straightforward, normal, plain way.

We should note that this view fits well with the two cleansings taught in the NT for the church. Jesus taught two cleansings in John 13 when He washed

His disciples feet. Jesus was teaching a spiritual lesson through the physical washing of the disciple's feet. Washing the feet portrayed the daily experiential cleansing a believer needs to undergo by confession of sin. When Peter refused this Jesus said "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Then Peter said to Him, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." Jesus said to him, He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean." Jesus made a sharp distinction between bathing and washing the feet. Taking a bath portrayed the spiritual truth of positional cleansing. This is a once for all cleansing that takes place at the moment of faith alone. Everyone but Judas was positionally clean because they had faith alone in Christ alone. Washing the feet portrayed the spiritual truth of experiential cleansing. This is a daily cleansing that takes place at the moment of confession of sin. Jesus warned that if Peter did not let Him wash his feet he would have no part with Him. This portrayed the spiritual truth that when we refuse to confess our sin we are not in fellowship with Him and therefore no divine good can result. For apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:4). The only difference is that we have no need of outer cleansing through animal sacrifice because Shechinah Glory is not dwelling in our midst. Whenever He does animal sacrifice is required and this explains animal sacrifice in the Millennium. With Shechinah Glory present and the Glorified Son of Man a heightened degree of holiness will extend from the temple such that all of Jerusalem will be considered holy. Those who come from afar must offer sacrifice to draw near (Zech 14:16-21).

We should also take note of the important fact that the animal sacrifices did teach the concept of substitution. The offerer would have to face the reality that sin required death and that the animal died instead of him. This does portray the Savior who offered Himself in place of guilty sinners. His sacrifice did something animal sacrifices could not do; expiate (remove guilt of sin) and propitiate (satisfy the righteous wrath of God against sin). But the sacrifices are of different kinds and functioned in different spheres and were for two different purposes. The animal sacrifices were for atonement, outer experiential cleansing, purifying the Israelites for tabernacle/temple worship while Christ's sacrifice was for expiation and propitiation, and served as the basis of positional and inner experiential cleansing.

Now that we understand that “atonement” provided external ritual “cleansing” for the Israelites and sacred objects in the midst of Shechinah we can understand the atonement seat of the Ark of the Covenant. Once a year on the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies and make atonement for the nation of Israel. This sprinkling of blood on the atonement seat provided a ritual purification for the entire nation of Israel so that Shechinah could dwell in their midst (Lev 16:29-34). That is the significance of the blood on the atonement seat of the Ark of the Covenant. It did not cover sin or propitiate God but it enabled a holy God to dwell in the midst of sinful men through corporate ritual purity. As Randall Price says, “this kind of sacrificial “atonement” is not for salvation nor for inward sanctification, but to preserve outward *corporate “sanctification”* (or ceremonial purification) so that a holy God can remain in the midst of an unholly people.”^{viii}

ⁱElwell, Walter A. ; Beitzel, Barry J.: *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich. : Baker Book House, 1988, S. 170

ⁱⁱTorrey, R.A.: *The New Topical Text Book : A Scriptural Text Book for the Use of Ministers, Teachers, and All Christian Workers*. Oak Harbor, WA : Logos research Systems, Inc., 1995, c1897

ⁱⁱⁱ Since God was entering into a contract with Israel, in conformity to ancient near eastern suzerainty-vassal treaties there were two copies or tablets of the Ten Commandments made. One copy was the Suzerain’s and the other copy was the Vassal’s. It seems that both copies were placed within the Ark (Exod 25:16). This is why it often called the Ark of the Covenant. Moses made a *copy* of the book of the law and this *copy* was placed beside the Ark of the Covenant (Deut 31:24-26).

^{iv} When God decided to choose one tribe to serve as priests He did so by having each tribe bring a rod. The rod that budded was the tribe God set apart to be His priests. The rod of Aaron was the one that budded. Since Aaron was of the tribe of Levi they served as the priests. This rod was the same rod that was cast before Pharaoh and turned into a crocodile in Exod 7:8-14. This rod was placed in the Ark (Nm 17:10; Heb 9:4). Elwell, Walter A. ; Beitzel, Barry J.: *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich. : Baker Book House, 1988, S. 169

^v Allen P. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord*, 93.

^{vi} Or a leprous house (Lev 14:33ff)

^{vii} Shechinah dwelled among Adam and Eve in the garden before the Fall but no sacrifice was required because Adam and Eve were not sinful. Shechinah will dwell among men along with the Lamb of God in the new Jerusalem and no sacrifice will be required because the people there are sinless and will never sin.

^{viii} Randall Price, *The Temple and Bible Prophecy*, 556.

[Back To The Top](#)