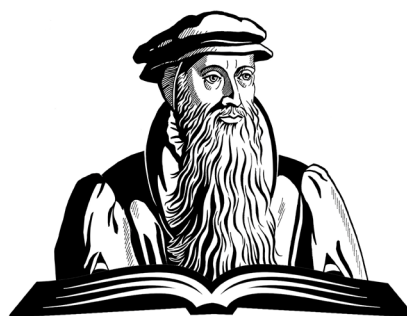


The Tabernacle of Moses

Video Lecture Series
by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Lecture 13 ~

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT



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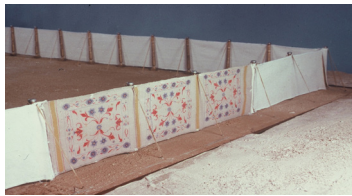
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Lecture 13 ~

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

Welcome again, to our last study in this series on the Tabernacle. I hope it has been an enriching journey for you to look at the various details of this mostly unknown or misunderstood building. So to profit most in this study, I would recommend you take the time to read through Exodus 25, verses 10 to 22, and perhaps also consult chapter 37.

And just as a review of what we learned so far, each part of the Tabernacle points to one thing—the full deliverance of sin. If you take the Courtyard, pointing to the regeneration, it is



the act of God, where God delivers from the reigning power of sin. And next is the Brazen Altar—we saw it pictures justification. That reveals God’s way of deliverance from the guilt of sin. Right after the Brazen Altar, we see the Laver. And with its pure water, the Laver portrays the work of sanctification through the Holy Spirit, and that wonderfully proclaims another aspect of deliverance, which is the deliverance from the pollution of sin. And finally, as we come into the sanctuary, where only gold meets the eye, that speaks about glorification—the final stage of salvation.



And glorification is the final deliverance from all the results and the very presence of sin. So can you see how, in that sense, the Tabernacle is one beautiful visual of 1 Corinthians 1:30, where it says: “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” And rightfully, Paul added in the next words, “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” To him alone

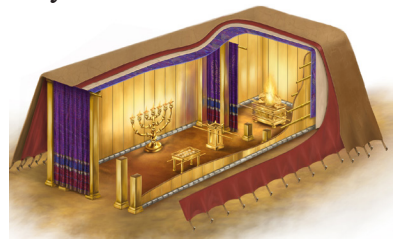


goes all the honor for the salvation of us as sinners.

Now let us approach, lastly, the Holy of Holies. When Shema asked the officiating priest about what else was there in that building, the priest might have answered something like this: “Well, dear boy, how often have I stood before that beautiful inner veil, and while admiring the images of the Cherubim gazing upon us, as we work in the Holy Place, I wished at times I could see behind it, but I have never been behind that second veil. “The Holy of Holies is forbidden ground for us priests. Only the high priest, he is allowed to enter in, and even he is only allowed to do this once a year. And, Shema, let me remind you that the curtains in this Tabernacle are not just for decoration. They are to emphasize separation. For do you know that the word “veil” in our Hebrew lan-

guage means “to separate”? God is telling us there is a need for space between him and us—separation, or a boundary. And that reminds us that God commanded Moses to embroider the images of the holy angels on that inner veil leading into the Holy of Holies. Don’t those angels remind you of the Cherubim that stood guard at the entrance of Paradise after God banished our parents from his presence because of their sin?

“So, my son, Shema, have you ever learned to see why we are banished from God’s presence? Do you realize already that your sins also separate you from your Creator? Do you know that the God of holiness cannot have fellowship with you? We can



only have access to him through prayer and worship, after all, his just conditions, as set out in his holy law, are met. And is that not a wonderful message, Shema, that God gives us, in this whole Tabernacle Building, that he’s made a way in which he can dwell among us, and in this, he can receive us back as well into his fellowship?”

So let us now consider the details of the Holy of Holies. The room is a perfect cube of five meters each. Like the Holy Place, all was gold except the veil and the roof. Both the veil and the roof were the white linen, woven with three colors, we have seen, all symbolic of Jesus Christ.

And yet, the main focus of the Holy of Holies is the Ark—the Ark of the Covenant. That single piece of furniture is actually the very center around which all the rest of the Tabernacle was built. It is the most sacred piece of furniture in the Tabernacle. The Ark symbolizes the place where God sits upon the throne—upon his throne. It is at the Ark where God will meet with his people, as he has stated in Exodus 25:22, “And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat.”

The Ark, which is mentioned over 170 times in the Bible, wasn’t a very huge object. It was a small, rectangular chest of about a meter and 125 centimeters long, and 75 centimeters wide and high. And as expected, it was constructed from shittim wood covered with gold. And as we’ve learned, it points to Jesus’ twofold nature. Well let me add a few more thoughts on the wood that was used to make this Ark.

The shittim wood, or the acacia tree, that is used, is said to be the most imperishable of all the kinds of woods. It was the only tree grown to any size in the desert, and it was able to thrive still in the harshest conditions. Now interestingly, this tree produced gum Arabic. And this substance was highly prized and used as medicine. The only way to harvest that was to pierce the tree in the dark. Now, as I learned these things about that tree, I couldn’t help but to see a silhouette of the Lord Jesus Christ in that whole tree.



But anyway, the most interesting part

of the Ark was the lid. The lid was called the Mercy Seat, or literally, “the Mercy Throne.” Well what’s unusual about this lid? This lid was made out a solid sheet or slab of pure gold. In other words, now catch this, there was no wood used in the Mercy Seat. That must be significant. It is significant. It reveals that the very throne of God has nothing human entering into it. Now what made the Mercy Seat even more special are the two angel figures that are standing on either end of it. They were not soldered onto it, no, they were, as well, beaten out of the slab of gold, as being one with the lid—amazing! From a craftsman’s perspective, this Mercy Seat with the Cherubim really defies all human ability.

The entire Mercy Seat breathed divinity in every detail, and only that. It is the only throne worthy of a God so great, so glorious, and, above all, so gracious. For did you notice, that this is



not called “the throne of justice,” it’s called “the seat of mercy.” It is the seat upon which God can, as it were, sit among people in the very clothing of mercy! How is that possible? How can God be merciful, while he is a just and an upright God, holding true to his own word? I wonder whether that question is actually portrayed in how the two angels are positioned on the lid. They did not stand on the lid looking heavenward in worship, or sideways at the people that would come before the throne. No, instead, they looked

downward, in a position of inquiry.

In 1 Peter 1, verse 12, the Apostle writes about the prophecies of the Old Testament, and about salvation, and he adds about the angels, “which things the angels desire to look into,” or, they stooped to look into, curiously. How significant is that phrase, and how it reminds us of these angel figures on the Mercy Seat of the Ark. In other words, the angels were curious—about what?—to see the unfolding of the story of salvation, through the incarnation of their Lord, the Son of God.

Now let us think through the different names that were given to the Ark in the Bible. As always, Biblical names are always revelation. Exodus 25:22 introduces the most frequent name, the Ark of Testimony. Now the Ark testifies. Every aspect of it, of God’s holiness, of his majesty, of his grace, and yet, above all, of his mercy. Within the Ark, Moses was to place the Tables of the Law, under the Mercy Seat. It testifies that God’s throne is based on the law, the holy law of God. In Numbers 10, verse 33, the Ark is called the Ark of the Covenant, and that emphasizes very beautifully, the intimate and personal relationship God has with his people. He desired to dwell among them, and he made the provisions for this in his covenant of grace. Then, in Joshua 3, verse 13, he Ark is called, “the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth.” What an encouragement this was for Joshua and for the people, as they stood finally before the conquest of Canaan, facing the Jordan River. Now, the strength of God, on behalf of his people, is pointed out in the fourth name given to the Ark—it’s called, “the ark of thy strength” in Psalm 132, verse 8. In the time of Josiah, it is also called, “the holy ark.” And this young King Josiah realized, just like his forefather, David, that restoring the proper worship of God is the key to the blessing on the nation. For whenever a nation honors the Holy One, and reflects the glory of him, that nation will be exalted and blessed.

Now according to Hebrews 9:4, the chest also contained three objects. We already mentioned the Law, but first of all, the Golden Pot with Manna was in the Ark, reminding us of God’s won-

derful, covenant faithfulness, as he provided the daily bread in the wilderness journey. Then, secondly, the law of God was added to that, the tables of stone, reminding us that the throne of God is based on the Holy Law. And then thirdly, Aaron's Rod that blossomed. Often this is seen as a symbol of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So, after having reviewed these few details, let me now conclude with drawing your attention to some spiritual truths set out in the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord. So first of all, all of the Holy of Holies, with the restricted access, sets out the glory that the Lord God is holy. For here, in the throne room—that is the throne room that Isaiah saw in the vision, where the angels cried out, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD,” and, “the earth is full of his glory.” To approach him casually, that could be deadly, and will be deadly, for the Lord is a consuming fire. Therefore, we are exhorted to serve the Lord with fear, with respect, and rejoice with trembling, in Psalm 2, verse 11. We are to be moved, friends, to pray for the grace whereby we may serve this God and speak to this God with reverence and godly fear.

Secondly, though the Lord God is holy, he's also a gracious God, he's a merciful God, he's an awesome Being. With peculiar emphasis, God calls this throne a mercy throne. There really is no throne like the throne of Jehovah. Though he is holy, though he is the Just One, though he is the Majesty of Heaven, he has revealed that he is a God of mercy and grace. And in Jesus Christ, God makes known his heart. In the Lord Jesus, my friends, we see how he paved the way whereby we can return to him and we can be reconciled together. Now he didn't make this way reluctantly, or in response to our fervent plea—he laid out this way in eternity. And he made it known from the day of our rebellion in Paradise. And though never leaving the throne of holiness, he has made it a throne of mercy. He has designed a way in which mercy could be exercised while maintaining the holy law and justice. How? Well, each year, this was symbolically portrayed on the Day of Atonement. Three times that day, the high priest would bring the blood of the sacrifice into the presence of God, sprinkling it on the Mercy Seat. In that sacrificed substitute, God sets out the way in which he was appeased, and was able to extend his gracious mercy to guilty sinners.

And when you come into the New Testament, you'll find that the words “Mercy Seat” is written with a much more difficult, but a very significant word: “propitiation.” Take, for example, 1 John 2, verse 2: “And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” Again, in 1 John 4:10, John extols the love of God in making his Son the Mercy Seat. He says, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation”—or Mercy Seat—“for our sins.” Do you see, in this testimony, God bears witness he is ready to receive us sinners at his Mercy Seat. Instead of sitting enthroned in majestic glory, surrounded with the forbidding sense of royalty, God reveals in this Mercy Seat, he is a willing, and he is able to receive us in grace in that well-beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

Each year, in that elaborate ceremony, the Mercy Seat was sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice. And the details of this are all found in Leviticus, chapter 16. First, the high priest would place a golden bowl with the coals and the incense inside the Holy of Holies, and that would fill the whole room with the fragrant smell. Then he would return to the Brazen Altar, and again he would enter into the Holy of Holies, now with a bowl of the blood of the sacrifice. And he would then sprinkle that seven times on the Mercy Seat. And this sprinkled blood symbolized the price that was paid—totally paid—and therefore God can show mercy. Seven is the number of completeness, and so God declared in that seven times what Jesus cried out on the cross, “It is finished!”

Today, we have no earthly Tabernacle. We don't have any blood sacrifices. We have no Holy of Holies hidden behind a thick veil. No, we have in the New Testament the revelation of a spiritual

Tabernacle in the living, the risen Lord Jesus Christ. In him, God has satisfied all the righteous demands of his law, and in his mercy, God removed the obstacle of that which separates us from God, symbolized in that veil, now rent. All of the gospel assures us that we as sinners are welcome to come boldly to the throne of grace. Hear it again from Hebrews: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness”—or liberty—“to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh” (Hebrews 10:19–20).

Now, what was unthinkable for any Jew is now our privilege. We may enter into the holy presence of God in Christ. It is now possible for our holy and just God to dwell with us, his people, and to fellowship with them. And this fellowship is made possible one way only—the blood of the sacrifice, or, in the New Testament language—the cross.

Now thirdly, and lastly, the Ark, with the pure gold Mercy Seat, again proclaims the divine wisdom of our God. Nothing human entered into God’s method of salvation. No one has been his counselor. None of the great minds of the world ever thought this plan of salvation out. Paul called the Lord Jesus Christ “the wisdom of God,” in 1 Corinthians 1:24. As it were, God bundled all his wisdom in the plan of salvation, through his own Son, Jesus Christ becoming man. In him, all the attributes were honored. His holiness was vindicated. His justice was completely maintained. His truth was upheld. His mercy was poured out. His grace was exercised. And they all stood in one divine harmony together, setting out the way of salvation. In poetic language, the sons of Korah sing about this, in Psalm 85, verse 10, where it says, “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” All of it is God’s, and all of it is done by God. To him be all the glory, all the praise, all the thanksgiving for such great salvation.

And friends, regretfully, with this, I need to conclude our series of our studies on a portion of Scripture which is often too much neglected. And I am conscious that in all these sessions, I have only scratched the surface of God’s message, as set out in the Tabernacle symbolism. Undoubtedly, as you continue to meditate more, and hopefully, as you will use this teaching also to teach others the great gospel themes with the picture of the Tabernacle, that you will experience what the Queen of Sheba experienced after having seen and heard Solomon. As she came away from him, and observing all his glory, she exclaimed, “And behold, the half was not told me” (1 Kings 10:7). Now this study is only to encourage us to study deeper in the Old Testament Scriptures, for doing that will help to grasp the riches of the New Testament teaching as well. For the New Testament is steeped with Old Testament symbolism and references. And no book shows that clearer than the very last book in the Bible—Revelation. John the Apostle, to describe what he saw, has borrowed his imagery, the glories of the new earth even from the ancient Tabernacle. And hear, therefore, in conclusion, one small sampling from the Book of Revelation, in 21:3 and 22: “And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God....And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.” Amen, and amen.