

# Exodus 25:10-22

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/exod/exod-25/exodus-2510-22/>

*Here are the LORD's instructions concerning the construction of the ark of the covenant along with its mercy seat. It is appropriate that the first item to be built is the ark. It symbolized the throne where the LORD was. The throne implies His sovereignty. It also was the place where He met with His people.*

In verses 10 – 16, the LORD specified how the ark was to be built. He told Moses that *they shall construct an ark.*

It was to be made of *acacia wood two and a half cubits long, and one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits high.* A “cubit” was approximately eighteen inches in length (or around 45 centimeters). This would make the ark around forty-five inches long, twenty-seven inches wide, and twenty-seven inches tall.

They were to *overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and you shall make a gold molding around it.*

They were to *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.* These rings would be used along with the poles in v. 13 to carry the ark on their way to the Promised Land.

Also, they were to *make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold* (v. 13). These poles, designed for carrying the ark, were to be put *into the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry the ark with them.* The poles were not to be removed. Instead, they were to *remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be removed from it.* This might have signified that the ark was ready to be moved any time the LORD led it to be moved.

Finally, they were to *put into the ark the testimony which I shall give you.* This is probably a reference to the two stone tablets containing the “testimony” ([Exodus 31:18](#)). This “testimony” is later confirmed to be the Ten Commandments ([Deuteronomy 4:13](#)). Placing the tablets in the ark illustrated that Israel's worship of their LORD needed to be centered around His revealed Word, in this case His Law. The Law explained the application of the Ten Commandments, how to apply treating others without envy, loving your

neighbor as yourself. These commandments the people consented to obey in the covenant between Israel (as vassals) and the LORD (as Suzerain) ([Exodus 24:3](#)). The phrase *I shall give you* fits with the ending of this section in chapter 31, where God gives the law to Moses written on stones.

It is appropriate that the discussion on how to build the ark comes first in the discourse on how to construct the tabernacle. The ark represented His presence among His people and thus was both a constant reminder of Israel's relationship with God as their provider and protector, and the people as His vassals. It was also a constant reminder of the standard by which they were to live and be judged. It reminded them of the covenant, and the commandments they had agreed to obey.

The next set of instructions described how the Israelites were to *make a mercy seat*. The Hebrew word translated *mercy seat* here (Heb. "kapporeth," "covering") comes from the verb (Heb. "kaphar") that means "to cover" or "to make atonement" ([Leviticus 1:4](#), for example). It would be better to translate it "place of atonement." Essentially, it was a solid lid that was to cover the ark and its contents. It is symbolic that this *mercy seat* covered the Law, indicating that God intended to provide an avenue for mercy to those who broke His Law (which is everyone but Jesus). The High Priest would sprinkle blood on the *mercy seat* each year on the Day of Atonement, to cover "all their sins" ([Leviticus 16:16](#)).

The Greek translation of the Old Testament (called the "Septuagint" or LXX) uses the Greek word "hilasterion" to translate "kapporeth" (*mercy seat*). The same word is used in [Romans 3:25](#) to refer to Jesus Christ as our "propitiation by His blood through faith." Jesus covers the Law for us once for all. Jesus provides a path of mercy for us to escape the requirement of the Law for sin, which is death (in this case, a separation from God). The annual sacrifice and sprinkling of blood was symbolic of Jesus' sacrifice made once for all, to atone for all sins ([Hebrews 9:7-12](#); [Colossians 2:14](#)).

A related Greek word ("hilasmos") is used to describe Jesus Christ as our "propitiation" in [1 John 2:2](#) and [1 John 4:10](#). The verb form is found in [Heb. 2:17](#), where Christ, our "merciful and faithful high priest," was qualified to "make propitiation for the sins of the people." Just as the *mercy seat* was a place where Israelites went to receive temporary atonement for their sins through the sprinkling of blood, Jesus Christ offers every person permanent atonement for their sins. Jesus is the true *mercy seat*, of which the tabernacle *mercy seat* was a copy. Jesus covers the law for all who believe ([Romans](#)

3:21-26). His blood shed on the cross is the blood that atones. This is also described in detail in [Hebrews 9](#).

The description of how to construct the *mercy seat* is as follows:

First, the *mercy seat* was to be made of *pure gold*. It was not something overlaid with gold—it was made of *pure gold*.

The *mercy seat* was to be *two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide*. This would make it around 3 3/4 feet long and 2 1/4 feet wide.

In verses 18 – 20, the LORD details another feature of the ark. He commands the Israelites to *make two cherubim*. A “cherub” (singular – the plural is *cherubim*) is a special class of angelic being. Its role seems to be that of guardian. It is also associated with the presence of God ([Psalms 80:1](#), [99:1](#); [Isaiah 37:16](#); [Ezekiel 9:3](#), [10:1 – 20](#)). In [Genesis 3:24](#), two *cherubim* guarded the entry into Eden and access to the Tree of Life.

In [Ezekiel 28:14](#), the king of Tyre (probably representing Satan) is called an “anointed cherub,” describing Satan’s nature before he fell into sin. This would mean that, before he fell, Satan was constantly in the presence of God.

The *cherubim* were to be made of *gold*, and the Israelites were to *make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat*. They were to be shaped by hammering the *gold* into the shape of a cherub, and they were to be placed on opposite ends of the *mercy seat*. That is, they were to *make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end*. Furthermore, they were to *make the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat at its two ends with 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*. This pictured the close relationship of the holy presence of the LORD with His desire to provide a place of atonement for the sins of His people.

In v. 21, the LORD told Moses to *put the mercy seat on top of the ark*. The *mercy seat* was the place where atonement was made for the people’s sins ([Leviticus 16:15-16](#)). Since the tabernacle was a “copy” of the true things in heaven, this likely represents Jesus entering the true Holy of Holies on our behalf. Jesus atoned for our sins once for all, with the sacrifice of Himself ([Hebrews 9:11-16](#); 24-28).

In addition, Moses was to *put the testimony which I will give to you*. This testimony was likely the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments

([Exodus 24:12](#); [31:18](#); [Deuteronomy 10:2](#)). Again, since this was a “copy” of true things in heaven, this copy of the Law in the ark likely represents Jesus, who is the Living Word ([John 1:1-5](#)). Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law ([Matthew 5:17](#)).

The ark was where the LORD would *meet with you* (i.e. Moses). The *you* is singular and refers to Moses. He was to receive revelation from the LORD and then pass it on to the people. The word for “to meet” (Heb. “ya’ad”) provides another of the several names for the tabernacle—the “tent of meeting” (“ohel mo’ed,” [Exodus 27:21](#)). And it was *from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony*, the LORD would *speak to Moses about all that He will give him in commandment for the sons of Israel*. Since this is a “copy” of the true things in heaven, this likely represents Jesus meeting believers when we approach Him in prayer, being now allowed to “enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus” ([Hebrews 10:19-22](#)).

Thus, the *mercy seat* was the place where the Israelites could make atonement for their sins and receive forgiveness from their holy and sovereign LORD. Today, to receive atonement and forgiveness, we go to Jesus Christ, who “dwelt” (lit. “tabernacled”) among us and proclaimed the way to receive the gift of everlasting life ([John 1:14](#), [6:47](#)). Jesus is our perpetual atonement. Jesus is also the source of ongoing cleansing from sin. He opened the way for those of us who believe in His name to enter the true holy place in heaven and have our consciences cleansed, through confession and prayer ([Hebrews 10:22](#)). Each believer now has the same spiritual access to meet with God that Moses and the people experienced in a physical sense.

### **Biblical Text:**

<sup>10</sup> “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. <sup>11</sup> You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and you shall make a gold molding around it. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. <sup>14</sup> You shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry the ark with them. <sup>15</sup> The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be removed from it. <sup>16</sup> You shall put into the ark the testimony which I shall give you.

<sup>17</sup> “You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. <sup>18</sup> You shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> 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.