

The Mercy Seat: By Daniel Malone 2006

When Moses first went to God he had to climb a mountain. Until one day, God gave him instructions to build a tabernacle for Him.

A tabernacle that they could carry away from Mt. Sinai into which God would descend when He came to them; that there would be no longer an occasion for going up Mt. Sinai, but that He would Himself come and pitch His tabernacle among them, and be present at their prayers; as also, that the tabernacle should be of such measures and construction as He had shown.

Hereupon, the Israelites rejoiced at what they had seen and heard of their conductor; and were not wanting in diligence according to their ability. --Josephus

And so they fell to work building the tabernacle.

Moses informed them, according to the direction of God, of its largeness and how many vessels it ought to contain for the use of the sacrifices. Inside was an ark made sacred to God. It was covered inside and out in gold that the wood could not be seen. It had also a cover united to it by golden hinges after a wonderful manner; which cover was every way evenly fitted to it and had no eminences to hinder its exact junction. There were two beams passed along it that it might be borne on the shoulders of the priests when it was moved. Upon its cover were two Cherubims their forms not like any creature men have seen, though Moses said he had seen them near the throne of God. These Cherubims formed the mercy seat, out of the center of which came a shining brilliance and the voice of God. In this Ark was placed the two tablets whereon were written by the hand of God the Ten Commandments five on each table, two and a half on each side. And this Ark was set in the most holy place.

But outside of the veil not far from the most holy place there was placed a table on the north side of the tabernacle. Upon this table were laid twelve unleavened loaves of bread, six on each heap one upon the other, made of the purest flour, and above those loaves were put two full vials of frankincense. After seven days other loaves were brought in their stead. Against the southern wall was set a candlestick of cast gold. Which candlestick was constantly burning. Between the candlestick and the table with the loaves was the altar of incense made of incorruptible wood and plated with gold. Before this was reared a brazen altar but it was within made of wood and adorned with brass plates as bright as gold. Hard by this altar lay the basins, vials, censers, and the caldrons all made of gold; but the other vessels made for the use of sacrifices were all made of brass.

Now when all things were prepared Moses appointed a festival and that sacrifices should be offered every one according to his ability. When the high priest approached the sacrifices he purified himself according to the law with oil and incense. In the first place he put on a girdle of fine twined linen called a Machanase. Next he wore a Chethone which is a linen made of fine flax that goes down to the feet and sits close to the body and has sleeves that are tied fast to the arms and is embroidered with flowers of scarlet, purple and blue. These are wrapped and tied around the priest with a belt called an Abaneth.

Over these he wore another long robe called a Meeir made of fine linen this time in a blue color, with the same embroidery as the other robe with a mixture of gold interwoven. To the bottom of which garment were hung fringes, in color like pomegranates, with golden bells. Besides these, the high priest put on a third garment called an Ephod which is woven of several

colors with gold intermixed and embroidered, but it left the middle of the chest uncovered. It was made with sleeves so that it looked like a short sweater with a square hole in the middle of it.

In the void place of this sweater there was a piece embroidered with gold and the other colors of the Ephod and was called an Essen. (The breastplate) This piece was attached to the Ephod by gold rings at each corner and tied with two blue ribbons that ran down each side. There were also two sardonyxes upon the Ephod at the shoulders to help fasten the breastplate like buttons having each end of the blue ribbon running to the sardonyxes. On these were engraved the names of the sons of Jacob, six on each stone on either side; and the elder sons names were on the right shoulder. Twelve stones were also on the Essen, extraordinary in largeness and beauty and they were an ornament not to be purchased by men because of their immense value.

They were in four rows of three. The first three were a sardonyx, a topaz, and an emerald. The second row contained a carbuncle, a jasper and a sapphire. The third a ligure, an amethyst, and an agate. The fourth row had a chrysolite, an onyx, and a beryl, which was last. The names of the sons of Jacob were engraven on these stones as well. This plate also had large gold rings that reached toward the neck and received finely wrought chains, which connected them with golden bands to the tops of the shoulders to help bear the weight. There was also a girdle or belt sewn to the breastplate of the aforementioned colors with gold intermixed which when it had gone once round was tied again upon the seam and hung down. There were also golden loops that admitted its fringes at each extremity of the girdle, and included them entirely.

The Mitre was a linen cap above which was another with swathes of blue embroidered, and round it was a golden crown polished, of three rows, one above another; on this crown called an Ephielis there was a golden plate above the forehead which had written the name of God, which was never translated into another language until around 70 A.D. and its inscription "Holiness to the Lord" was in the Samaritan language.

After the sprinkling of blood, oil and spring water for seven days purified them, their garments and the tabernacle; they had the feast. Then, as God commanded them, they sacrificed either a bull, a ram, or a kid of the goats, for a sin offering had to be a male. These offerings had to be of their first year though of bulls it may be of a greater age. When they were slain, the priests sprinkled the blood round about the altar; they then cleansed the bodies, and divided them into parts and salted them and laid them upon the altar. Then they piled the wood and started the fire. Next they cleaned the feet and inwards of the sacrifices in an accurate manner and laid them to rest to be purged by the fire, while the priests received the hides.

But those that offered thank offerings sacrificed the same creatures but such as were unblemished and above a year old; however males and females were acceptable. The blood of these also were sprinkled around the altar; but they laid upon the altar the kidneys the caul and all the fat, and the lobe of the liver together with the rump of the lamb; then, giving the breast and the right shoulder to the priests, the offerers feasted upon the remainder of the flesh for two days, and what remained they burned. And all of this was done according to the decrees of God.

There are many examples in the Old Testament to which we can look to and gain an understanding of God's ways. The previous story is paraphrased from sections of Josephus' "Antiquities of the Jews", the stories of Exodus, and the Mosaic laws of Leviticus. It is a glimpse of the preparations the Lord desires of us when we approach him. We should be aware of what God has asked those of old. It is no small undertaking. He required Moses to climb a mountain each time he spoke to God. He commanded the Israelites to build Him a tabernacle and offer sacrifices that required all kinds of preparations and special clothes and processes. God desires

us to prepare ourselves for His presence. Since the veil is now rent in two with the sacrifice of our Redeemer, God asks us to be a living sacrifice with a broken heart and contrite spirit.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to come to church and see the mists that surrounded the tabernacle in times of old telling everyone that The Lord Jehovah is inside. That the great I Am is among us. Would we have the audacity to walk through the doors and look upon the mercy seat without becoming a living sacrifice? Consider now the consequences of two men whose sacrifice was not as the Lord commanded. They were not prepared.

But as they laid their offering upon the altar a sudden fire was kindled of its own accord, and appeared to the sight like fire from a flash of lightening, and consumed whatsoever was upon the altar. But the offering of Aaron's two eldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, was not as Moses bade them bring but as they used to do formerly, which sacrifices were already burnt to death. The fire from the altar rushed upon them and nobody could quench it. And they burned to death because of it.

(paraphrased from the historical record of Josephus)

Don't let your lack of preparation, or lack of a proper sacrifice cause you to share the same fiery conclusion as the sons of Aaron. Our God is a jealous God and desires our full heart. We can understand the lengths He wishes us to go to by remembering what He commanded the house of Israel so long ago. Of course, we don't have to climb a mountain, and we are no longer under the Law of Moses. However, now that Christ has made the last sacrifice and has become sin's final atonement, we are everyday required to remember Him and keep His commandments that The Holy Comforter will be with us. This is a preparation we make every day, all the time. I am led to believe also, that when we conduct our services and approach God in our sanctuaries we are required to make even greater preparations.

In times of old The Lord was in the tabernacle. He was seen: As the surrounding mists, He was the consuming fire, He was the light that beamed from the Sardonyx on the high priests robes, He was the rushing wind and the lightening. He was there and made himself known and dwelt with them. It says He wanted them to build Him a tabernacle that He may be present at their prayers. And surely He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

So now I am caused to reflect upon the preparations I have made when entering the house of the Lord. Have I revered Him enough? Have I expected Him to be there? Have I listened for His voice? Have I sung praises to His name with all the joy of my heart as if I were standing before Him? Have I offered up to the Lord the sacrifice He is asking for? Did I prepare myself before I reached for the door? It is my hope that this article will reach the hearts of those reading and cause some reflection and self-inspection. So that as a church we can answer all of these questions in the affirmative when we meet together and approach the mercy seat.

“Which repentance mercy claimeth: otherwise justice claimeth the creature, and executeth the law...and mercy claimeth the penitent...according to their works:...thus none but the truly penitent are saved.”—Alma 19:104-106