

# **The Theology of the Tabernacle**

## **Part 4**

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### **Chapter VI**

#### **The Lampstand of Gold:**

#### **The Doctrine concerning Worship, Continued**

The floor lamp is not a modern invention, but is as old as the Tabernacle at least. The Tabernacle contained a floor lamp, for that is what the golden candlestick was in the Holy Place. We are substituting the more descriptive title “lampstand” for the King James rendering of “candlestick.” It was more than a candlestick, as we designate such. The blueprint for it is given in Exodus 25:31–40, “And thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold: of beaten work shall the candlestick be made: his shaft, and his branches, his bowls, his knops, and his flowers, shall be of the same. And six branches shall come out of the sides of it; three branches of the candlestick out of the one side, and three branches of the candlestick out of the other side: Three bowls made like unto almonds, with a knop and flower in one branch; and three bowls made like almonds in the other branch, with a knop and a flower: so in the six branches that come out of the candlestick. And in the candlestick shall be four bowls made like unto almonds, with their knops and their flowers. And there shall be a knop under two branches of the same, and a knop under two branches of the same, and a knop under two branches of the same, according to the six branches that proceed out of the candlestick. Their knops and their branches shall be of the same: all it shall be one beaten work of pure gold. And thou shalt make the seven lamps thereof: and they shall light the lamps thereof, that they may give light over against it. And the tongs thereof, and snuffdishes thereof, shall be of pure gold. Of a talent of pure gold shall he make it, with all these vessels. And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount.”

The substance of the material for the furniture of the Tabernacle was different in the Holy Place. In the outer court brass was the prevailing material. Brass had to do with the judgment of sin. In the Holy Place gold was the material that predominated. This was no accident or chance occurrence. The gold speaks of the Deity of Christ. It was the only object that set forth in such a visible way His Deity. Two objects of furniture, the lampstand and the mercy-seat, were made entirely of gold. The lampstand was the perfect symbol of Christ as the Son of God—“That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9). He was a “light of the Gentiles” (Isaiah 42:6). Had He been psilanthropic and had not come out from God, He would have been merely another teacher who “darkeneth counsel by words.” He would have only added another ethical system to the already multitudinous and multifarious systems, and He would have been but the harbinger of darkness “through philosophy and vain deceit.” But as the Son of God He “is light and in him is no darkness at all.”

The lampstand was handmade, of beaten work, and was highly ornamented. There was a central shaft with three branches on a side, making seven branches in all. Each branch contained three sections, each section being beaten into the shape of an almond blossom, a blossom and a knop. On top of each shaft was an open almond blossom. On each of these were placed the olive

oil lamps. The almond blossoms looked like wood but they were gold, reminding us of Aaron's rod that budded. When Aaron's priestly prerogative was in question, the budding of his almond rod established it. The almond rod, a dead branch, was made to live and bear fruit. Christ was established as the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead. It did not make Him the Son of God, for He was that from the eternal counsels of God. Resurrection confirmed it. Aaron was the God-appointed high priest, and it was confirmed by resurrection in the dead almond rod. The resurrection of Christ likewise established His priesthood. Christ is our great High Priest, because He became a man and partook of our nature, "tempted in all points as we are, sin apart." But the primary basis of His priesthood is His Deity. The priest represented men before God. Christ is God who became a man, and it is now the God-Man who represents man. The resurrection which declared Him the Son of God likewise declared His priesthood.

There were no measurements given for the lampstand of pure gold. That which speaks of His Deity alone cannot be measured, for Deity is beyond the computation of man, neither can a tape be placed along that which speaks of God. Again, the priesthood of Christ, which is conditioned on the fact that He became a man, is made to rest on His Deity. There is not recorded any incident in the life of Christ in the Gospels which does not instantly record His Deity with every mention of His humanity; yet never confusing or fusing the two. In the shortest verse of the Bible, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35), there is recorded a perfectly human incident in His life. It is a characteristic of humanity to weep; it is perfectly natural. But the tears were not dry upon His cheeks before He commanded, "Lazarus, come forth." And Lazarus came forth. That was perfectly divine-only Deity has the power over death.

One technical point about the lampstand is of interest-it was a lightholder. The olive oil lamps were placed upon the lampstand. The lampstand supported the flame, but the flame revealed the beauties of the golden lampstand. The olive oil lamp is a Scriptural symbol of the Holy Spirit. The analogy is striking. Christ sent the Holy Spirit into the world and He supports the Holy Spirit in His work, but the Holy Spirit takes the things of Christ and reveals them unto believers. As the olive oil lamps were supported by the lampstand and they in turn revealed the beauties, thus Christ is the foundation and support for the work of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit in turn reveals the things of Christ (See John 16:12-15).

The lampstand gave light in the Holy Place, it not being possible for natural light to percolate or penetrate there. The priest inside walked by divine light, and had to go outside for natural light. True worship today is in spirit and truth. It is where the Spirit takes the things of Christ and reveals Him unto the believers. Walking by the light of reason, intellect, science, or the golden rule may be fine and proper for the natural man, but these never lead the soul into the place of fellowship with God. Natural light is the extent of these, and by virtue of the appeal to the natural man are indeed dazzling. The moths are attracted, and the light that draws them is their destruction. But the true worshipers behold only Christ, and that is never discerned by the natural man, but only with the aid of the Holy Spirit. The beauties of Christ are never beheld by the natural man, but are revealed only by the Holy Spirit.

Divine light was only found in the Holy Place. Only as worshipers in the present age pass by the cross and laver and come to Christ for light are they truly worshiping God. Christ is the lamp unto our feet, and the Holy Spirit is the light unto our path. Christ said, "I am the light of the world." The true believers alone know that to be true.

Believers today have been sent into the world as lights: “Ye are the light of the world.” We are merely reflectors, to reflect His light. Only as we walk in Him can we be light in the world. A reflector must be where light is in order to reflect it.

“Come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord” (Isaiah 2:5).

## **Chapter VII**

### **The Altar of Gold:**

### **The Doctrine of Worship, Concluded**

The third and final article of furniture which stood in the Holy Place was the altar of incense or altar of gold. There were two altars in the Tabernacle. These were distinguished in a three-fold manner: first, as to the kind of material out of which they were made; second, as to the location of each; and, third, as to the kind of offerings made thereon. These distinguishing differences will be enlarged upon as we proceed in our consideration of the altar of gold. The instructions for the same are found in Exodus 30:1–10: “And thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon: of shittim wood shalt thou make it. A cubit shall be the length thereof, and a cubit the breadth thereof; foursquare shall it be; and two cubits shall be the height thereof: the horns thereof shall be of the same. And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, the top thereof, and the sides thereof round about, and the horns thereof; and thou shalt make unto it a crown of gold round about. And two golden rings shalt thou make to it under the crown of it, by the two corners thereof, upon the two sides of it shalt thou make it; and they shall be for places for the staves to bear it withal. And thou shalt make the staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold. And thou shalt put it before the vail that is by the ark of the testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the testimony, where I will meet with thee. And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations. Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon. And Aaron shall make an atonement upon the horns of it once in a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonements: once in the year shall he make atonement upon it throughout your generations: it is most holy unto the Lord.”

The altar of gold was the place where incense was burned. Sacrifice of any kind was forbidden—only incense could be offered. It was made of shittim wood overlaid with gold. It was 1x1x2 cubits. It speaks of Christ.

Incense is a symbol of prayer and praise, as several Scriptures assure: “And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours [incense], which are the prayers of saints” (Rev 5:8). “And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel’s hand” (Rev 8:3–4). David cried, “Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense” (Psalm 141:2). After the close of the giving of the Old Testament canon, heaven was silent for about four hundred years. Then the silence was broken by the intrusion of the presence of an angel at the time of incense: “And it came to pass, that while he [Zacharias] executed the priest’s office before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the priest’s office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of

incense” (Luke 1:8–10). God initiated a new dispensation at the altar of incense as the people were in prayer.

The altar of gold is first of all a figure of Christ as our great intercessor. This altar was where Aaron, the great high priest, ministered. Aaron ministering before the altar was a figure of Christ, our High Priest in heaven—“We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens” (Heb 8:1). Christ is in the heavens today praying for His own. The seventeenth chapter of John is a fair sample of the prayer He offers for His own. It is the Lord’s prayer. In this prayer He declares specifically that He only prays for His own: “I pray for them [those the Father gave Him]: I pray not for the world.” The writer to the Hebrews makes this further arresting comment: “Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for *them*” (7:25, R.V.). There were two articles of furniture which spoke of His work in heaven for us: the laver and the altar of gold. The instructions for both are given in the great worship chapter. The laver speaks of His work in cleansing His own in preparation for worship, and the altar of gold speaks of His intercessory work when He protects and perfects us: “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom 8:34).

A contrast of the two altars at this point will throw light upon our subject. The altar of gold is where God dealt with a saint; the altar of brass is where He dealt with a sinner. The altar of gold speaks of heaven; the altar of brass speaks of earth. The altar of gold has to do with holiness; the altar of brass has to do with sin. The altar of brass as a figure represented what Christ did on earth; the altar of gold as a figure represented what Christ does for us in heaven.

When the writer to the Hebrews catalogues the articles of furniture of the Tabernacle in the ninth chapter, he includes the altar of gold with the furniture in the Holy of Holies. We are not attempting to settle that mootable problem, but believe it to be suggestive. Now the veil is removed, and the believer can come with boldness to the throne of grace because he is in Christ. He has a position in the very presence of God. The altar of gold belongs rightly in both places. In the Holy of Holies it suggests the intercessory work of Christ for us; in the Holy Place it suggests our part in worship. It suggests the place where we pray and praise God. Christ is the one who genuinely worships God. He truly praises God in His prayer work for us. We have no merit that makes our prayers and praise acceptable to God. The basis of our prayers is not ourselves. God does not hear and heed our prayers because we are who we are, but because Christ is who He is. This is seen in the altar of gold. It was not a bloody altar. Sacrifices of every description were forbidden. But it was consecrated with blood once a year, evidently on the day of atonement. The death of Christ upon the cross is the basis of the prayers of the saints. Our prayers are acceptable because “He hath made us accepted in the beloved.” When Christ was on earth, a voice out of heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Christ is the only one who pleases God, and God is pleased to hear the prayers of His own only in Christ. Again the voice out of heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, hear ye him.” This beloved Son is not only the one for man to hear, but is in truth the only one whom God hears. Positionally, to pray in the name of Christ means to present all His merit, worth and work as the grounds for acceptance and the instrumental cause for answering prayer. “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Heb 13:15).

There is one final word about this altar. Aaron was instructed to offer a “perpetual incense” upon it. This reminds us of the injunction of Paul to the Thessalonians, “Pray without ceasing.” Again, “strange incense” was forbidden to be offered. Also, the formula for the incense was not

to be duplicated. The “strange incense” speaks of any attempt to worship God which is contrary to God’s Word. Duplication is equally as bad, for it speaks of trying to please man while trying to serve God. A dead ritual and a lifeless liturgy are an abomination to God and produce spiritual deadening to man. Adjuncts to worship that are calculated to draw the crowds, and give man the impression that he is worshipping God, when in fact he is not, are bound to kill true worship, and appeal merely to the natural man.

“Praise ye the Lord.”

## **Chapter VIII**

### **The Veil Which Was Rent: The Doctrine of the Incarnation**

Before going on into the Holy of Holies, a brief word concerning the veil will suffice to aid us in understanding the articles of furniture therein. The veil was the third curtain which separated a holy God from sinner man. It separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. It was made of fine-twined byssus linen, in which were wrought cherubims of gold. It was dyed blue, purple and scarlet. On the march it furnished a covering for the ark: “and when the camp setteth forward, Aaron shall come, and his sons, and they shall take down the covering vail, and cover the ark of testimony with it” (Numbers 4:5).

The name veil means to hide or to cover. It protected the holiness of God, whether on the wilderness march or when it was in its place in the Tabernacle. It protected the holiness of God from the profanity of man. It protected both God and man.

When the Temple of Solomon was erected, the veil was perpetuated in the Temple, only it was larger and more elaborate. It was a beautiful work of art, gorgeous in design, artistic in color, superb in the minutest detail, and rich in adornment. It was exquisitely wrought in its texture, being of “cunning work.” Josephus tells us it was four inches thick in his day and renewed each year. Wild horses tied to each end of the veil after it had been taken down were not able to rend it asunder.

The veil was a figure of the humanity of Christ. The writer to the Hebrews makes this evident: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness 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” (Heb 10:19–20). The veil stood silently reminding man that God would be manifest in human flesh. “Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim 3:16). “God was in Christ” (2 Cor 5:19). “In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9). The veil was a prophetic picture-parable of the humanity of Christ—a silent symbol of the Incarnation.

As long as the veil hung in its place it separated God and man. The sinner could come no farther than the gate to the outer court. From there to the Holy Place only priests served. But the priests were forbidden to pass the veil. Only the high priest could come past the veil, then only once a year, on the great day of atonement—but he could never enter without blood. All this revealed to man how far his sin had separated him from God. The veil was the final separating object. As long as it was not rent, it was a wall of separation that shut man out. As long as Christ walked the earth, He separated God and man. His perfect life, “holy, harmless, and separate from sinners,” condemned man. His life revealed the awful chasm and deep abyss that stood between God and man. If the humanity of Christ is the requisite humanity in which God can dwell, then is the race of mankind woefully undone. If the life of Christ is the only life that is acceptable to

God, then are we horribly lost. No man can measure up to Christ. It is blasphemy for a man to pillow his head at night and say even for one day that he has lived like Jesus. If we have to be as good as Christ in order to get to God, then are we forever shut out. His spotless life only mirrors our imperfections, His teachings merely reveal how far short we have come. The life of Jesus can never save us. That spotless humanity must be rent on the cross if man is to be saved. Someone has said, "I got into the heart of God through a spear wound." That is the teaching of the rent veil. It was not rhetorical style that prompted the Gospel writer to include the agonized and pierced cry of Christ on the cross with the rending of the veil in the temple: "And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" (Mark 15:37–38). When Christ expired the veil was rent, telling out in a symbolic way that the way into God was now open, and that it required nothing short of the death of Christ. Thus the purpose of the incarnation is revealed. Christ did not come in human flesh to set us an example, or to teach us about God, or to propound a system of ethics. He did all this, but the primary purpose of His coming in human form was to offer that body as a sacrifice for the sin of the world. "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me."

"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance."

## **Chapter IX**

### **The Ark of Gold and Wood: The Doctrine of Christology**

We have now come into the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Tabernacle. As we come in closer to the dwelling place of God, the emphasis is removed from the work of Christ to the person of Christ. There were two articles of furniture in the Holy of Holies, the ark and the mercy-seat. We shall direct our attention first to the ark. The instructions for it are found in Exodus 25:10–16: "And they shall make an ark of shittim wood: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof. And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, within and without shalt thou overlay it, and shalt make upon it a crown of gold round about. And thou shalt cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in the four corners thereof; and two rings shall be in the one side of it, and two rings in the other side of it. And thou shalt make staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold. And thou shalt put the staves into the rings by the sides of the ark, that the ark may be borne with them. The staves shall be in the rings of the ark: they shall not be taken from it. And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee."

Israel was a theocracy, and Jehovah was king. In this they were unlike the nations round about them. The ark was God's throne. He did not sit upon it in any anthropomorphic sense, but He dwelt between the cherubims: "The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth between the cherubims" (Psalm 99:1). If its place in the blueprint had anything to do with it, the ark was the most important article of furniture, for the instructions for it were the first given of any part of the Tabernacle. The fact that it was God's throne lent importance to it. No Israelite ever saw it, so sacred was it. Only the high priest was permitted to behold it. On the wilderness march it was carefully wrapped, first in the veil and then with badgers' skins. This chest, measuring two and one-half by one and one-half by one and one-half cubits, was made of shittim wood, overlaid both inside and outside with gold. It was thus a true symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ, setting forth both His Deity, represented by the gold, and His humanity, represented by the wood. It spoke of Him in the hypostatic union—very God of very God and very man of very man. The ark could not

be spoken of as merely a wooden box, for it contained gold; and it could not be called a golden chest, for it contained wood. It required both to maintain the symbolism pointing to Christ as the God-Man. To overlook this duality is to entertain a monstrous notion of His person. There is no doctrine of Scripture so filled with infinite mystery, so far removed from the skein of man's thinking, so foreign to the realm of explanation, than the hypostatic union in Christ. Yet there is no symbol so simple as the ark—merely a box made of wood and gold—yet it speaks of things unfathomable. Truly God chooses the simple things to confound the wise. That simple box tells out the whole story, as far as man can take it in, of the unsearchable mysteries of the blessed person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The gold was both inside and out. “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9). He was not merely a thaumaturgist. Neither was He a man with an over-developed God-consciousness. He was God. He spoke as God. He put Himself on the same plane with God: “Ye believe in God, believe also in me.” And again, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father [God].”

Likewise He was a perfect man. He grew tired and sat down at a well in Samaria in the cool of the day. He slept, He ate, He drank, and He laughed and wept. And beyond all that He suffered. All these are human characteristics.

The gold and the wood in the ark were both required; yet neither was mingled with the other, nor was the identity of one lost in the other. Christ was both God and man, but these two natures were never fused or merged. He never functioned at the same time as both God and man. What He did was either perfectly human or perfectly divine. Christ was a theanthropic person.

The ark was not merely an empty box. It contained three items which are enumerated in Hebrews 9:4: “Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant.” between God and men: “For there is one God, and one mediator. Christ as the theanthropic Person is the only Mediator between God and men: “For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5).

The tables of the covenant speak of the kingship of Christ. He was born a king, He lived a king, He died a king, He rose from the dead as a king, and He is coming again to this earth as the king. God's program is moving today, and has been from all eternity, to the time when Christ shall rule over this earth, for “he will turn and turn until he comes whose right it is to rule.” This earth needs a ruler, and man needs a king, and some day He is coming as “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”

The pot of manna speaks of Christ as prophet. He spoke for God: “Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:32–35). Christ not only spoke for God but He was God's message to man. He was the logos, the Word of God, the very alphabet of God, the Alpha and the Omega. He was God's final message to man. Since Christ came heaven has been silent, for God has no addenda to place after Christ. There can be no postscript to the letter where Christ is the embodiment of that letter. God has told out His heart in Christ.

Aaron's rod in the ark speaks of the work of Christ as priest. The prophet spoke for God before men; the priest spoke for man before God. As a priest Christ offered Himself. As a priest

He has passed into heaven, and even now sits on God's right hand. We have spoken previously of the work of Christ as priest. Suffice it to say here that there is a man in the glory at this very moment for us. As Aaron's rod which budded, the authority of his priesthood, was in the Holy of Holies, thus today there is in heaven at God's right hand the man Christ Jesus who was raised from the dead. He is the unique example of resurrection up to the present hour. He is there for us.

These three-fold functions describe the office of Christ as Mediator. There must be one who can represent man before God and one to represent God before man. He must have authority to rule. Christ fulfills all this, for He was God before man, and today He is man before God. He is both God and man. He is able to bring a holy God and sinner man together. He is the answer to Job's heart cry: "For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both" (Job 9:32-33).

"And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us."

## **Chapter X**

### **The Mercy-Seat of Gold: The Doctrine of Propitiation**

We come now to the final chapter as we consider the last of seven articles of furniture of the Tabernacle. We have attempted to examine the Tabernacle from the viewpoint of the furniture, for it constituted the important position of the Tabernacle. The tent and coverings were primarily for the furniture. The curtains served as means of separation for the articles of furniture. The furniture has afforded us a vantage point from which to make examination of the theology of the Tabernacle. Quite properly this discussion could be enlarged in order to take in the other phases of the Tabernacle, but there could be very little elaboration made of the doctrines examined herein which could be found in the articles of furniture.

There were two articles of furniture in the Holy of Holies. The appearance of them seemed as one, but careful examination revealed two, for the mercy-seat furnished a top for the ark. They would appear to be the same thing, but they were separate and distinct. However, the instructions for both are given together. The blueprint for the mercy-seat is contained in Exodus 25:17-22, following the blueprint for the ark.

"And thou shalt make a mercy seat of pure gold: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof. And thou shalt make two cherubims of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat. And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end: even of the mercy seat shall ye make the cherubims on the two ends thereof. And the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be. And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel."

The mercy-seat was a top for the ark, but it was a separate piece of furniture. It was made of pure gold, two and one-half by one and one-half cubits. On top of the mercy-seat and coming out of it were two cherubims of gold. The mercy-seat was highly ornamented, and was probably the special work of Bezaleel. We are bold enough to affirm that the mercy-seat was the most



important article of furniture, and where all was God-appointed the mercy-seat was supreme. In the instructions God interjects this revealing declaration: “And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat.” On the great day of atonement God issued a warning to Aaron not to come at all times within the veil, “for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.” On the wilderness march it was from above the mercy-seat between the cherubims that God directed Israel: “And when Moses was gone into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with him, then he heard the voice of one speaking unto him from off the mercy seat that was upon the ark of testimony, from between the two cherubiums: and he spake unto him” (Numbers 7:89). In 1 Chronicles 28:11 the temple is defined as “the house of the mercy seat.”

The mercy-seat is where God communed with man. It was where God was found. There is no anthropomorphic notion that God sat upon the mercy-seat. He dwelt between the cherubims. The mercy-seat of gold sets forth the Deity of Christ again. There is a resurrected Christ upon the throne of the universe today. The man in the glory is sitting at the Father’s right hand, waiting until the time when His enemies shall be made His footstool and He will receive the throne of David.

As we approach the teaching of the mercy-seat in its primary import, it is essential to see what made it a mercy-seat. In order to ascertain this a consideration must be made of the great day of atonement, for only on this day did the high priest approach the mercy-seat. At the time of the great Yom Kippur, Aaron, after casting lots for the scapegoat, offered the other on the burnt altar. After offering a bullock for himself, an analogy which finds no parallel in Christ, Aaron brought the basin of blood within the veil and sprinkled it upon the mercy-seat. The blood made it a mercy-seat. God did not look down upon the merit of Aaron, or the goodness of the people, but God saw the blood. The sinner nation was made nigh by the blood. Christ is the mercy-seat today: “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Rom 3:25). The word translated “propitiation” is in the Greek the same word for mercy-seat. Christ is the mercy-seat today for the world. This phase of His work is enlarged upon in Hebrews 9:24–28, where Christ is seen as the sacrifice which taketh away the sin of the world.

God is propitious today toward the world. He is “mercy-seated,” as it were, toward the world. It is extraneous to try to do something to make a ground of approach to God; God has already done that work, and He is propitious to an infinite degree. God does not have to be won over by the sinner; He is already won over. God’s face is not turned away from the world in anger; His hands are outstretched toward a gainsaying world, His mighty bared arm of salvation is revealed. When the sin of man stood between God and man, He came forth and bore the penalty that there might not be anything that would shut man out from the heart of God. He says, “Come on, come on, I have provided the mercy-seat.” God now can save a sinner who does no more than to trust in Jesus. The question now is, “Will ye be reconciled to God?” God is waiting, wanting and yearning to save the last, the least and the lost. The mighty bared arm and the on-surg-ing and pulsating heart of God are revealed today toward a world in sin and darkness that does not know that God loved them to the nth degree. The publican does not have to cry for mercy now, for God has a meeting place where publicans and sinners come. There is a mercy-seat in heaven. Men talk about committing the unpardonable sin today. What is this thing they call the pardonable sin? There is no act one can commit today that will shut one away from that mercy-seat. To remain in a state of unbelief alone will shut one out. There is a mercy-seat.

Living, He loved me;  
Dying, He saved me;  
Buried, He carried my sins far away;  
Rising, He justified  
Freely forever:  
One day He's coming-  
O glorious day!

Cleburne, Texas