

Moses is on Mount Sinai with the LORD and will be there for forty days while the LORD instructs him on what will be required of the children of Israel. In chapters 25-27 the LORD gives Moses the directions for constructing the tabernacle and the items associated with the worship of the LORD. Our lesson focuses on the verses describing the construction of the ark of the testimony.

1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2 Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering.

The LORD directs Moses to take an offering from the children of Israel of specific materials that will be used to build the tabernacle, its furniture and all the tools and utensils that will be used by the priests in the worship of the LORD through the offering of sacrifices and other duties dictated by the LORD. Contributing to this project will not be mandatory, so that only those who love the LORD will provide the materials for His worship. Verses 3-7 list the materials that will be needed to build the tabernacle and the other items required for the worship of the LORD. Quite likely these items come from the things that the Egyptians gave to the children of Israel as they were leaving Egypt (Ex. 12:35-36).

8 And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. 9 According to all that I shew thee, *after* the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.

“And let them make me a sanctuary [sacred or holy place]; that I may dwell among them” – The children of Israel are to use the materials that are contributed to build a “sanctuary” (holy place) prepared so that the LORD may dwell among them. It is incredible to think that the LORD wants to dwell among and have fellowship with His people! **Zech. 2:10** speaks of when Christ will dwell among His people during His millennial reign on earth: *“Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD.”* The apostle Paul describes how the LORD dwells within us today as born again Christians in **2 Cor. 6:16**: *“And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”* In Revelation we are told that God will dwell with His redeemed throughout eternity: **Rev. 21:3** *“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.”*

“According to all that I shew thee...even so shall ye make it” – Moses is to build the tabernacle and everything in it, following the “pattern” [likeness; image] that the LORD will show him. Commentators do not agree if the LORD showed Moses a vision of the real temple in heaven or merely showed him a vision of how the earthly version should look and be constructed (a sort of blueprint). It is likely that Moses was able to see details that are not specified in the text. Regardless, the earthly tabernacle (and later the temple) were crude copies of the heavenly temple. **Heb. 8:5** (speaking of earthly priests in contrast with Christ, our eternal priest) *“Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.”*

Verses 10-15: The instructions are given to build the ark. It was to be a chest made of shittim (acacia) wood that was overlaid with gold, measuring 2.5 cubits long, 1.5 cubits wide and 1.5 cubits high. Different cultures had different lengths for a cubit but it was universally defined as the distance from a man’s elbow to the tip of his middle finger (which obviously varied from man to man). Using an estimate of 18 inches/cubit, the ark measured 3 feet 9 inches long, 2 feet 3 inches wide, and 2 feet 3 inches high. It had golden rings on each side into which golden staves were inserted so that the ark could be carried.

16 And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee.

The two stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments which the LORD promised to give Moses (Ex. 24:12) would be placed in the ark as a testimony of the covenant between Israel and the LORD. They represented His will for Israel and the commandments that Israel agreed to obey. **1 Ki. 8:9** (speaking of the ark at the dedication of Solomon’s temple) *“There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt.”*

17 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.

The mercy seat was a plate of solid gold that was the same length and width as the ark and not only served as the lid of the ark but it also was the place where the blood of the sacrifice would be sprinkled by the high priest once a year on the Day of Atonement. The Hebrew word for “mercy seat” means “a covering” and “atonement.” On the Day of Atonement the high priest would sacrifice a lamb for the sins that were committed by the people that year. He would then take the blood of the sacrificed lamb and enter the Most Holy Place (where the ark stood) and sprinkle it on the mercy seat as an atonement or covering for the people’s sins. This blood stood between the law of God inside the ark (violated by the people) and the Shekinah presence of God hovering above the mercy seat. The picture of Christ’s blood intervening for us and our sins is obvious.

18 And thou shalt make two cherubims of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat. 19 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. 20 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.

On the ends of the mercy seat (being one piece with it) were to be two golden cherubims “of beaten work” (not poured into a mold but shaped by a hammer). The two cherubims faced one another looking down at the mercy seat and had their wings stretched over it to cover it. Images of cherubim were used prominently to decorate the tabernacle (and later the temple) so the LORD apparently considered it important to include them on the mercy seat. There are certain classes of angels that constantly surround the throne crying “Holy Holy Holy,” although Isaiah called them “seraphim” (Isa. 6:2-3). Before his fall, Satan was described as “the anointed cherub that covereth [to protect]” (Ezek. 28:14), implying that one of the duties of the cherubim was to guard the throne of God. It may be that the cherubims covering the mercy seat (from which the LORD spoke to Moses) symbolized the throne of God being guarded by these angelic beings.

21 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.

The mercy seat, with the cherubims on each end, will be set on top of the ark. The LORD will give Moses the tablets of stone containing the “testimony” (the Ten Commandments) and they will be placed within the ark. When the blood is sprinkled on the mercy seat on the Day of Atonement, the blood will be “covering” the sins of the people (the broken law), and will come between the LORD and the sins of the people. This pictures how that the blood of Christ permanently covers and atones for our sins today.

22 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.

This spot above the mercy seat and between the two golden cherubim atop the ark becomes the earthly dwelling place for the LORD. Whenever the LORD needs to speak with Moses to give commandments to Israel, He will speak from this spot between the cherubims above the mercy seat.

Psa. 80:1 “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.”

Isa. 37:16 “O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth.”

Verses 23-39: Instructions for constructing the table of shewbread, the golden lampstand, and various dishes and utensils needed in the tabernacle are provided. The table of shewbread was built of similar materials to the ark and was also designed to be portable.

40 And look that thou make *them* after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount.

The instructions that Moses wrote down omit a lot of detail and so the LORD reminds him to follow the “pattern” that he was shown while with the LORD on the mountain. It is important that the tabernacle and its contents are constructed to properly foreshadow the coming Savior and His sacrifice that will be made for mankind.