

Finding Mercy: Dwelling with God

Exodus 25:10–22

Getting Started

1. Think of a home, office, or public space designed to be remarkably welcoming and accessible. What specific structural details made it feel that way?
2. When you consider approaching God, do you tend to feel instinctive confidence, quiet hesitation, or a desire to keep a safe distance? What shapes that reaction?

Context

In Exodus 25, the Lord invites Moses up Mount Sinai to deliver blueprints for a sanctuary so that He may "dwell in their midst" (Exodus 25:8). Notably, God starts His architectural blueprint from the inside out: beginning not with outer walls or perimeter courts, but with the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place.

For Israel, this small, gold-overlaid acacia chest served as the physical center of the camp and the earthly footstool of Yahweh's presence. Every detail of its construction revealed both the non-negotiable holiness of God and His gracious desire to live among a broken people.

Hearing the Word

Read Exodus 25:10–22 aloud. Have one or two group members read the text slowly so the group can visualize the physical pieces.

3. **(Observation)** List the physical components, dimensions, and materials commanded for the Ark (vv. 10–15) and its cover (vv. 17–20). What stands out about its craftsmanship and portability?
4. **(Interpretation)** Why was it necessary for the Ark to be transported using poles threaded through gold rings rather than handled directly with human hands? What does this teach about God's nature?
5. **(Observation / Interpretation)** Verses 16 and 21 specify that the "tablets of the covenant law" were to be placed *inside* the chest. In ancient times, copies of treaties between a king and his people were preserved inside sacred chests. What does housing the Ten Commandments inside this box reveal about the kind of relationship God was establishing with Israel?
6. **(Interpretation)** The cherubim on the cover face downward toward the lid with wings outstretched (vv. 19–20). Cherubim first appear in Genesis 3:24 guarding the way to the Tree of Life after humanity's fall. Why are these fierce guardian figures positioned

directly over the Ark? What tension does their presence create?

7. **(Interpretation)** The gold lid (v. 17) is called the *kapporet*—the "atonement cover" or "mercy seat"—where sacrificial blood was sprinkled once a year on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). Why must the blood be placed *on top of* the cover, situated between the condemning Law inside the chest and the holy presence of God above?
8. **(Observation / Interpretation)** In verse 22, God promises: "*There, above the cover between the two cherubim... I will meet with you.*" Notice that the space above the lid remains entirely empty of statues or carved idols. How does this promise fulfill the central purpose of the entire tabernacle?

Exploring the Passage in Light of Christ

Read Romans 3:23–25a and Hebrews 9:11–14.

9. In Romans 3:25, the Apostle Paul says that God put forward Christ as a "propitiation" (Greek: *hilastērion*, the exact word used in the Greek Old Testament for the Ark's Mercy Seat). How does Jesus fulfill what the golden cover of Exodus 25 only foreshadowed?
10. Think of the 18th-century poet William Cowper, who lived in deep despair over his sin until reading Romans 3:25 and realizing Christ had absorbed the judgment demanded by the Law. In what ways do modern people today try to construct their own "mercy seats" or clear their guilty consciences without relying on Jesus?

Applying the Word

11. The ultimate goal of the atonement cover was not merely legal acquittal from sin, but real communion: "*There... I will meet with you.*" How does knowing that Jesus covers your broken record reshape your daily prayer life and communion with God?
12. Consider the ways our own lives, attitudes, or church environments are structured. What "steps," thresholds, or cultural barriers do we sometimes inadvertently place in the way of outsiders or struggling sinners who need to encounter God's mercy?
13. Which aspect of God's character revealed in the Ark do you most need to rest in this week: His uncompromising holiness, His covering mercy, or His desire to dwell with you?

Responding in Prayer

- **Adore** God for His perfect holiness, justice, and His plan to dwell with His people.

- **Confess** any tendencies to bank on good works, religious rituals, or spiritual denial rather than relying solely on the blood of Jesus.
- **Thank** Jesus for being our true Mercy Seat, absorbing the penalty of the Law so we may approach the throne of grace with confidence.
- **Ask** the Holy Spirit to open doors of intimacy and fellowship in your home and community, extending Christ's welcome to those who feel far off.