

# Propitiation

*Propitiation* is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ by which He appeases the wrath of God and conciliates Him who would otherwise be offended by our sin and would demand that we pay the penalty for it.

Propitiation is translated from the Greek word (**hilasterion**), meaning “that which expiates or propitiates” or “the gift which procures propitiation”. The word is also used in the New Testament for the place of propitiation, the “mercy seat.” (Heb. 9:5). There is frequent similar use of **hilasterion** in the Septuagint. Ex. 25:18 ff. The mercy seat was sprinkled with atoning blood on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:14), representing that the righteous sentence of the Law had been executed, changing a judgment seat into a mercy seat (Heb. 9:11-15; compare with “throne of grace” in Heb. 4:14-16; place of communion, Ex. 25:21-22).

Another Greek word, (**hilasmos**), is used for Christ as our propitiation. 1 John 2:2; 4:10, and for “atonement” in the Septuagint (Lev. 25:9). The thought in the Old Testament sacrifices and in the New Testament fulfillment is that Christ completely satisfied the just demands of a holy God for judgment on sin by His death on the cross.

God, foreseeing the cross, is declared righteous in forgiving sins in the Old Testament period as well as in justifying sinners under the new covenant (Rom. 3:25, 26; cf. Ex. 29:33, note). Propitiation is not the placating of a vengeful God but, rather, it is the satisfying the righteousness of a holy God, thereby making it possible for Him to show mercy without compromising His righteousness or justice.

The Hebrew **kaphar**, means “to propitiate, to atone for sin”. According to scripture, the sacrifice required by the Law only covered the individual’s sin making the sin offering and secured personal divine forgiveness. The Old Testament sacrifices never removed man’s sin. “*It is not possible...*”, Heb. 10:4. The Israelite’s offering implied confession of sin in anticipation of Christ’s sacrifice which did,

finally, “put away” the sins “done previously in the forbearance of God”. Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:15, 26. The word “atonement” does not occur in the New Testament; the word in Rom. 5:11 is “reconciliation”.

The beginning of the subject of propitiation is found far back in the Bible, back to the designing of the tabernacle in the wilderness, the tent which God had the people of Israel set up which would be the center of His presence on earth.

The tabernacle occupies a large portion of Scripture, sixteen chapters in the book of Exodus and the whole book of Leviticus. Every feature of the tabernacle, of the worship carried out there, of the priestly life and duties, of the vestments of the priests, the sacrifices, the feast days—every feature was vitally important and designed by the Lord for eternal purposes. It is very important for the church age believer to have a good working knowledge of the Levitical system in order to appreciate fully the work of Christ and the plan of God as they have been instituted in the world.

## There was great stress on the blueprint of the tabernacle.

**Exodus 25:8-9** “And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.”

The pattern was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, along with the Law. Read Hebrews 8:1-6. The tabernacle was a symbolical expression of spiritual truth.

The congregation of the Jews did not go beyond the courtyard of the tabernacle. They made offerings only at the brazen altar; and only the priests were allowed to go anyplace else in the tabernacle. The tabernacle was the dwelling place of God on

earth, and God was unapproachable by sinful men. The main lessons being taught had to do with the perfection of God and the sinfulness of man.

## The Furniture of the Tabernacle

### Brazen Altar

This altar was the beginning of a person's approach to God. Animal sacrifices made there taught that substitutionary sacrifice is the first step toward fellowship with God. When a person passed outside the gate of the tabernacle, the only thing that he could see was the smoke rising from the burnt offerings, and through the one gate could be seen the altar of sacrifice and the blood being shed. Everything else was hidden from view by the curtain. This was a continuous reminder of "the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." The only thing the unbeliever can ever see is the Gospel, the good news of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice for us.

A description of the brazen altar is found in Ex. 27:1-8 and Ex. 38:1-7.

### The Laver

Here the priests cleaned their hands and arms before performing any service or act of worship (Ex. 30:17-21). It was placed between the brazen altar and the tent of worship (the holy place). This cleansing symbolized the spiritual cleansing which is essential to both worship and service.

### The Candlesticks

These illustrated the need for illumination, the light of the world. See Ex. 25:31-40; 37:17-24.

### The Table of Bread

An illustration of the need for spiritual food. See Ex. 25:23-30; 37:10-16.

### The Altar of Incense

From Ex. 30:1-10, this piece of tabernacle furniture illustrated the need for acceptable worship and prayer. No animals were offered on this altar. The offering was an incense offering, indicating that

which is pleasing to God, divine good (gold, silver, and precious stones). The fire for the altar of incense came from the brazen altar, indicating that worship can only come after salvation. No strange fire was allowed; and Nadab and Abihu died for disobeying this rule.

### The Veil

The veil symbolized the barrier between God and man; only the high priest could enter the holy of holies, and that only once a year on the day of atonement, to offer the blood on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant.

### The Ark of the Covenant

The ark of the covenant was located in the holy of holies of the Tabernacle. It was made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold. Its dimensions were 50 inches long by 30 inches wide by 30 inches deep. The ark was a picture of Christ bearing our sins, the box part representing Christ. The wood illustrated the humanity of Christ, the gold represented His deity.

Inside the ark were three objects representing sin (Num. 17:8, 10; Heb. 9:4). The tables of the Law represented sin in the sense of violation or transgression of God's order. The pot of manna represented rejection of God's provision. Aaron's rod represented revolt against God's authority.

Over the top of the box was a lid of solid gold, the mercy seat (or throne). Over each end of the mercy seat was a gold cherub, the highest ranking angel. The first cherub represented the absolute righteousness of God, and the second cherub represented the justice of God. Together they represented the holiness of God. The cherubs faced toward each other, wings outstretched towards each other, and looked down at the mercy seat. "Righteousness" looks down and condemns (Rom. 3:23). "Justice" looks down and assesses a penalty.

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest went into the holy of holies twice; once to make atonement for his own sins, and then to do so for the people. He sprinkled blood from the sacrifice on the ark, on the top of the mercy seat, between the cherubs. This was a graphic illustration of God's grace provision for sin. "Righteousness" looks at the blood of the animal, which represents

the spiritual death of Christ on the cross, His substitutionary atonement, and is satisfied. “Justice” looks at the blood and is satisfied that the penalty paid for sin was sufficient, teaching that Christ was judged and paid the penalty for us.

Therefore, the ark speaks of redemption - Christ paid for our sins, paid our ransom, to purchase us from the slave market of sin.

So we have in the ark and the mercy seat a picture of God’s satisfaction with the work of Jesus Christ known as propitiation.

Now, the Hebrew word for mercy seat is **kap-poreth**. The Greek word used in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament is **hilasterion**. This same Greek word is found in the New Testament in Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:5; 1 John 2:2; and 4:10 and is translated “mercy seat” or “place of propitiation”. So there is a direct relationship between the mercy seat in the tabernacle and the doctrine of propitiation.

## Summary

Because of propitiation, God is free to love the believer without compromising either His righteousness or justice. The thought in the Old Testament sacrifices and in the New Testament fulfillment is that Christ completely satisfied the just demands of a holy God for judgment of sin.

Propitiation is not the placating of a vengeful God; but it is, rather, the satisfying of the righteousness of a holy God making it possible for Him to show mercy without compromise. Propitiation demonstrates the consistency of God’s character in saving the worst sinners. Propitiation reconciles man to God. This means that sin is no longer the issued between man and God. The only issue, for the Old Testament and New Testament believers, is “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” (Acts 16:31)