

Harmonizing Love with Holiness – By Propitiation

[Ephesians 1:7; 2:4](#)

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. (see [Conciliate Defined](#))

Propitiation is translated from the Greek (*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 in [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 of 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 of the Law only covered the offeror's sin and secured divine forgiveness. The Old Testament sacrifices never removed man's sin. "It is not possible." [Hebrews 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."

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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 symbolic 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.

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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 of the fence. 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. 38:17](#).

The Laver – Here the priests cleaned their hands and arms before performing any service or act of worship ([Ex. 30:18-21](#)). 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 offering of incense, 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.

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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. And 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 – 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.

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Now, the Hebrew word for Mercy Seat is (kapporeth). 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.

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 issue between man and God. The only issue, both for the Old Testament and New Testament believers, is "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Fred Doud shares Biblical insights.