

The Attackers: Former Ritual, Present Reality: Propitiation: Mercy Seat Is Place of Atonement for OT Believers, the Cross for NT Believers, Rom 3:25; Spiritual Death of Jesus becomes the “Blood” that Propitiates the Father; Jesus Is the First Fruits of Subsequent Resurrections, 1 Cor 15:20–23; Reconciliation: the Barrier Removed

II. Propitiation:

Romans 3:25 - Whom God publicly displayed by means of His blood [spiritual death] as the place of propitiation [ἱλαστήριον (hilastérion): mercy seat] through faith in Christ. This was a demonstration of His righteousness because of the passing over! [atonement] of previously committed sins because of the delay in judgment from God [pre-cross sins];

1. Propitiation is the translation in English Bibles of the Greek word ἱλαστήριον (hilastérion) and it means “mercy seat.”
2. It becomes obvious that if you do not understand the ritual of *Yom Kippur*, you cannot understand Paul’s teachings in Romans 3:25.
3. The mercy seat is the lid over the ark of the covenant. It is upon this lid that proof of the sacrificial goat’s death had been accomplished on the brass altar in the outer court.
4. Paul associates Christ’s substitutionary spiritual death with the mercy seat by the use of the word *hilastérion*.
5. The spiritual death of Christ is described by use of the metonymy: a figure of speech that replaces the name of one thing with the name of something else closely associated with it.
6. The figurative “blood of Christ” speaks of His spiritual death on the cross, or propitiation, just as the literal blood of the goat on the mercy seat represented its physical death, or atonement.
7. The Day of Atonement was replaced by the “Day of Propitiation” when, on the cross, the Lord exclaimed “Τετέλεσται (Tetélestai)! (It is finished!)” after which He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. (John 19:30)
8. This act of mercy allows God to deal with us mercifully:

In heathen religions the people who sacrificed or did anything to appease their god ... believed that they were manipulating him. In Christianity, however, it is never people who take the initiative or make the sacrifice, but God Himself who, out of His great love for sinners, provided the way by which His wrath against sin might be averted.

The effect of Christ's work on the cross is the salvation of the sinner, who then becomes capable of fellowship with a holy God. The individual Israelite was instructed to bring an animal for sacrifice whenever he approached God ... the nation was to be thus represented by the high priest annually on the Day of Atonement when the blood of the offering was sprinkled upon the mercy seat (*hilastérion*) on the ark of the covenant within the Holy of Holies. At the end of the Old dispensation, Jesus appeared as the offering that was to take away “the sin of the world” (John 1:29). (p. 771)

† “Literally, the passing over of sins done formerly, i.e. since Adam” (C. I. Scofield, *The New Scofield Reference Bible: Authorized King James Version* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1967], 1214n “o”).

As the blood of the animals sprinkled upon the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant is simply an illustration of what the sacrifice (blood) of Christ does when applied to believing sinners, so is also the phrase in Romans 3:25, “for the remission² of sins.”³ (p. 772)

9. The concept behind the word propitiation has to do with the Godward side of salvation dealing with the integrity of God.
10. For the sacrifice of Jesus to have its intended effect, the righteousness and justice of God must be satisfied with the result.
11. Righteousness demands righteousness and justice demands justice. Whatever righteousness demands, justice must execute.
12. When righteousness observed Jesus on the cross it demanded righteousness in Him. To be qualified as the substitutionary sacrifice, Jesus had to be in status quo sinless perfection.
13. As a qualified substitute, Jesus became the potential target to be imputed the sins of the human race.
14. The Lord’s personal love for the Father motivated Him to agree to receive the imputation.
15. Having then become identified with the sins of the world, righteousness which demands righteousness, at that point demanded justice judge those sins.
16. The Lord’s unconditional love for the human race motivated Him to receive that judgment and justice judged every sin ever committed – past, present, and future – in Christ.
17. This judgment took place between the hours of noon and 3 o’clock P.M. on the Feast of Passover, in April of A.D. 33.
18. After this, Jesus gave up His spirit and experienced physical death. His spirit went to heaven in the care of the Father, His soul to Paradise in the care of the Holy Spirit, and His body went into the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.
19. His body remained in the grave for three days and three nights and was resurrected on the Feast of First Fruits.
20. In fact, there are three feasts associated with the eight days that begin with Passover and each is a teaching aid regarding the Messiah.
21. Collectively, the three dealt with the spiritual death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus:

The feast of Passover spoke of Messiah’s death as a sacrificial and substitutionary sacrifice.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread indicated that His body would not decay in the grave.

The Feast of Firstfruits proclaims that death could not hold her Foe. “Up from the grave He arose, with a mighty triumph o’er His foes”⁴

² Ibid.

³ Spiros Zodhiates, gen. ed., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, rev. ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1993), 771–72.

⁴ Kevin Howard and Marvin Rosenthal, *The Feasts of the Lord* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 21.

22. Paul referred to the Lord's resurrection as first fruits in:
- 1 Corinthians 15:20** - But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.
- v. 21** - For since by a man came spiritual death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead.
- v. 22** - For as in Adam all die spiritually, so also in Christ shall all be made alive in the resurrection.
- v. 23** - But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming [**the exit resurrection or Rapture of the Church**].
23. Paul is speaking of the harvest described in Leviticus 23:9-14. On the first day of harvest the first sheaf, or first fruits, of the farmer's harvest is bundled and presented to the Lord.
24. God's acceptance of this offering insured that the rest of the crop would enjoy a successful harvest. Jesus is pictured as being the First Fruits of a systematic series of resurrections.
25. The next scheduled resurrection is that of the Church, noted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:23, "... those who are Christ's at His coming."
26. Subsequent to these two are the resurrections of Old Testament saints at the Second Advent and millennial saints at the conclusion of human history.
27. Several people in Scripture are documented as having been raised from the dead, but these were resuscitations rather than resurrections:
- (1) The widow's son in 1 Kings 17:17-24, (2) the Shunammite woman's son in 2 Kings 4:18-37, (3) Jairus's \jā'-ī-rūs\ daughter in Luke 8:49-56, and (4) Lazarus in John 11:43-44.
28. Consequently, to date, the only resurrection has been that of our Lord's recorded in Matthew 28:6; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6, and John 20:9.
29. The resurrection of Christ is divine confirmation that God was propitiated – satisfied – with His work on the cross providing reconciliation for whosoever would believe in Him.

III. Reconciliation:

1. The Greek verb translated "reconcile" is **καταλλάσσω (katallássō)**. The word literally means "a change of status quo, from being spiritually dead to becoming spiritually alive." God is the subject of this verb and man is the object.
2. This indicates that God has withdrawn His wrath. If God is propitiated by the work of Christ, then man is reconciled to Him.
3. This divine act is defined as "the removal of the barrier between God and man, replacing enmity with peace.
4. The word peace – **εἰρήνη (eirēnē)** – is used as a synonym for reconciliation. Every person who is saved was at enmity with God from physical birth to the point of reconciliation.

5. Having the barrier removed constitutes an article of peace between God and the individual believer.