

A Brief Biblical Background to the Idea of Atonement

The first direct promise of 'atonement' through 'a seed of the woman' was declared in Gen 3:15.¹ Nonetheless, one could argue that the first allusion to atonement was given in Gen 2:21-22 through God giving life to the woman by piercing the man's side, probably alluding to the piercing of Christ's side which officially confirmed his death on the cross;² the apostle Paul refers to Gen 2:22-24 as a mystery of salvation and compares Adam and Eve to Christ and his bride (church) that has life through his death.³ Later allusions to atonement could be seen in the animal that was sacrificed in order that Adam and Eve may be covered by its skin, Abel's sacrifice, Noah's sacrifice, and Abraham's practice of offering sacrifices to God.⁴ Nevertheless, the first time animal sacrifices were directly related to the concept of atonement was at the time of Moses with the introduction of the concepts of cleansing, forgiveness and the Day of Atonement.⁵ In the later history of Israel, moving from the Mosaic period of theocracy to the Davidic era of monarchy, the initial atoning idea of the 'seed of the woman' is adjusted into the idea of the seed or 'son of David' who would bring the promise of God to fulfillment.⁶ Shortly after, Isaiah would develop further the identity of the promised one by describing him as 'the branch of David', who is strangely both the one who rules and judges in righteousness and

¹ LaRondelle points out that this was the first prophecy about the coming of messiah in Gen 3:15, 'he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.' See Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-time Prophecies of the Bible* (Sarasota, FL: First Impressions, 1997), p. 272-273. Furthermore, according to Doukhan, the harming of the seed and the defeating of the serpent is simultaneous—'The Hebrew describes the crushing of the head and the bite of the heel by the same verb: *shuf*.' Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: the Apocalypse through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), p. 111.

² See Jn 19:34.

³ In Eph 5:31-32 Paul refers back to the Genesis account of the creation of women and he compares Adam and Eve to Christ and the church.

⁴ Christian A. Eberhart, *The Sacrifice of Jesus: Understanding Atonement Biblically* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress press, 2011), pp. 68-70.

⁵ Roy E. Gane, 'The Unifying Logic of Israelite Purification Offerings Within Their Ancient Near Eastern Context' in *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 21/1-2 (2010), pp. 85-98.

⁶ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), pp. 149-152.

‘the suffering Servant’, and as ‘the Anointed One’.⁷ In the subsequent exilic period Daniel would describe further ‘the Anointed One’ as the one who would abolish sin and atone for iniquity, and furthermore, he would expand his identity by depicting him as ‘the Stone’ which crushes the kingdoms of this world and as ‘the Son of man’ who would establish his eternal kingdom in glory that would be inhabited by the resurrected saints.⁸

During his earthly ministry, Jesus claimed the fulfillment of the messianic promises by confirming that he was ‘the Son of David’⁹, ‘the suffering Servant’¹⁰, ‘the Anointed One’¹¹ and ‘the Son of man’¹² who would bring the world under God’s dominion once again. As he was dying on the cross he pronounced that his earthly ministry ‘is finished’;¹³ though his heavenly ministry is yet to be finished in the future through the similar words – ‘it is done’;¹⁴ and his work of redemption is completed only through the creation of the New Earth with the same words – ‘it is done’.¹⁵ Calvin would similarly describe the threefold ministry of Christ in terms of his work as a prophet, priest and king.¹⁶ Following Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension, the NT writers reflected upon the meaning of his death and have employed a variety of metaphors and images in order to describe the meaning of the Passion of Christ, such as ‘reconciliation’, ‘sacrifice’, ‘justification’, ‘forgiveness’ and ‘ransom’.¹⁷ Out of all of the NT writers it is only the Apostle Paul who relates the concepts of justification and reconciliation

⁷ Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, pp. 216-217.

⁸ Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, pp. 246-249.

⁹ See Mt 22:42-44.

¹⁰ See Mt 16:21.

¹¹ See Lk 24:25-27.

¹² See Mt 26:64 and 24:30.

¹³ See Jn 19:30.

¹⁴ See Rev 16:17.

¹⁵ See Rev 21:1-6.

¹⁶ See Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), p. 372.

¹⁷ Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament & Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 58-59.

directly to the cross of Christ.¹⁸ Most of the NT writers link the image of sacrifice (or a sacrificial lamb), the idea of forgiveness, and the concept of ransom (or redemption) with Christ's death.¹⁹ Mark and Matthew use the concept of ransom (λύτρον) to describe Christ's death,²⁰ and Matthew and Luke link the idea of forgiveness (ἄφεσις) to his death.²¹ Blomberg points out that each of the Gospel writers had a unique theological emphasis, and thus one should consider the original intentions of each of the Gospel writers.²² Blomberg points further that the latest, or 'third' quest for historical Jesus, has, in the last few decades, focused on 'Jesus as a Jew'.²³ Blomberg also states that though the gospels were written in Greek, Jesus spoke Aramaic;²⁴ moreover, Jesus thought and spoke within the framework of a Hebrew mindset.²⁵ Thus, it appears that Hebrew concepts and paradigms lay behind the Greek words of Jesus in the Gospels, similar to LXX, which clothed Hebrew ideas into Greek language. Consequently, in order to understand the words of Jesus, one should consider the wider

¹⁸ It is curious to notice that while Jesus did use the concept of justification, he never related it to his death. The following are the only instances where Jesus used the term justification: 'you are the ones who justify (δικαιοῦντες) yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts.' (Lk 16:15); 'I tell you that this man (*the tax collector*) rather than the other (*the Pharisee*) went home justified (δεδικαιωμένος) before God.' (Lk 18:14); 'for by your words you will be justified (δικαιωθήση), and by your words you will be condemned (καταδικασθήση). (Mt 12:37). While James polemically discusses the issue of justification he, nonetheless, never directly links the idea of justification to the cross of Christ.

¹⁹ See Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7; 1 Tim 2:6; Tit 2:14; Heb 9:15; 1 Pet 1:18-19; Rev 5:9.

²⁰ '... and to give his life as a ransom for many.' Mk 10:45 and Mt 20:28.

²¹ See Mt 26:28 and Lk 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43 and 26:18.

²² 'The value of redaction criticism... remains great, perhaps even more than that of source or form criticism... readers of the Gospels from the beginning of the church history have recognised that the different authors had different theological emphases... text from the Gospels should therefore want to stress what the original author intended.' Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*, 2nd edition (Nashville, Tennessee: B & H Publishing Group, 2009). p. 106

²³ 'Since just before 1980, that quest has taken an even more conservative turn, buttressed primarily by a resurgence of interest in Jesus as a Jew. This so-called "third quest" for Jesus of Nazareth finds some historically accurate material in almost all major categories of Synoptic teachings and deeds of Jesus, although John is still seen as far more theological than historical.' Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, p. 90.

²⁴ 'Second, even with Jesus' sayings, it is noteworthy that this verbal parallelism occurs in Greek, that is, in translation of the Aramaic that Jesus originally spoke.' Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, p. 98. However, Blomberg also suggests that 'occasionally Jesus himself probably spoke in Greek'. See chapter 10, 'The Historical Jesus'.

²⁵ 'Hebrew or Aramaic idioms can be reconstructed behind a substantial percentage of Jesus' teachings.' Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, p. 460.

background context provided by the Old Testament scriptures.

The word λύτρον which Jesus employed means ‘price of release, ransom, means of setting free’.²⁶ In LXX this word is used extensively; for instance, in the Pentateuch λύτρον carries the meaning of cultic ransom or redemption of people, animals and property.²⁷ The verb λυτρόομαι has the same basic meaning in LXX - ‘redeem, set free, deliver’.²⁸ In the Pentateuch the verb λυτρόομαι is not used in a strictly cultic context, but it also points to God’s liberating power, as he delivered his people from Egypt.²⁹ The same idea of liberation from Egypt can also be found in 2 Samuel and in 1 Chronicles.³⁰ Similarly, in the Psalms, this verb primarily carries the meaning of deliverance from human enemies.³¹ Nonetheless, Ps 130:8 also speaks of ransom or deliverance from sin.³² In Micah, the same verb is used to point specifically to delivery from the Babylonians.³³ Hosea uses the concept of ransom in a different context as he points to deliverance from death and the grave;³⁴ the same idea can also be found in Ps 49:15.³⁵ Therefore, apart from its cultic usage, it appears that the concept of ransom in the Old Testament points primarily to God’s liberating power as he delivers his people from their enemies – these enemies could be individual enemies, kingdoms or nations, but these could also be impersonal enemies such as sin, and ultimately, death and the grave.

In the NT the concept of redemption is used in a similar way. In Luke’s Gospel one finds the idea of God redeeming his people from their enemies;³⁶

²⁶ See Friberg Greek Lexicon

²⁷ See Ex 21:30 and 30:12; Lev 19:20 and 25:24-52; Num 3:12-49, 18:15 and 35:31-32 in LXX.

²⁸ See Friberg Greek Lexicon

²⁹ See Ex 6:6 and Deut 13:5-6 in LXX.

³⁰ See 2 Sam 7:23 and 1 Chr 17:21 in LXX.

³¹ For instance see Ps 7:2-3, 144:10 [143:10 in LXX], 25:22 [24:22 in LXX], 26:11 [25:11 in LXX], 32:7 [31:7 in LXX], 44:26 [43:27 in LXX], 59:1 [58:2 in LXX], 69:18 [68:19 in LXX], 119:134 [118:134 in LXX].

³² See Ps 130:8 [129:8 in LXX].

³³ See Mic 4:10 in LXX.

³⁴ See Hos 13:14 in LXX.

³⁵ See Ps 49:15 [48:16 in LXX].

³⁶ See Lk 1:68 and 2:38.

Luke used the same term λύτρωσις to point to the Second Coming of Christ, possibly drawing on the imagery of ransom from death and the grave as portrayed in Hosea and Ps 49:15.³⁷ The Apostle Paul used the related term ἀπολύτρωσις in calling Christ our ‘redemption’,³⁸ saying that we have ‘redemption’ through Christ³⁹ (and he also used another related term ἀντίλυτρον portraying Jesus as a ‘ransom’ for humankind).⁴⁰ Paul, like Luke, also used the concept of redemption to point to the Second Coming of Christ, and to the redemption of the physical body, thus probably pointing to the idea of ransom from death and the grave.⁴¹ Moreover, similar to the author of Psalm 130, the Apostle Paul used the related verb λυτρόομαι when speaking of ransom from sin,⁴² and Peter also used the same term to express the idea that Christ ransomed us from a worthless, futile way of living.⁴³ Therefore, the idea of ransom, or redemption, or liberation appears to have a considerable importance and continuity between the OT and the NT.

There is another concept, that is in principle related to the terms λύτρον and λυτρόομαι, which is also used in the NT to illustrate the idea of liberation. The Book of Revelation uses the term ἀγοράζω to portray Christ’s death on the cross⁴⁴ and the literal meaning of this term is ‘to buy, purchase, do business in a marketplace’.⁴⁵ In the LXX this verb refers to buying (food or any other items),⁴⁶ and the corresponding noun ἀγορα refers to an aspect of trading in a market place.⁴⁷ In the NT the usage of the verb is identical as it also refers to the

³⁷ See Lk 21:27-28.

³⁸ See 1 Cor 1:30.

³⁹ See Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7 and Col 1:14.

⁴⁰ See 1 Tim 2:6.

⁴¹ See Eph 1:14 and 4:30; Rom 8:23. The author of Hebrews also used the same term ἀπολύτρωσις in Heb 9:15, but in a cultic context.

⁴² See Tit 2:14.

⁴³ See 1 Pet 1:18.

⁴⁴ See Rev 5:9.

⁴⁵ See Friberg Greek Lexicon.

⁴⁶ See Gen 41:57 and 42:5, 42:7 and 43:42, 44:25; Deut 2:6; 1 Chr 21:24; 2 Chr 34:11; Neh 10:31 [in LXX 10:32]; Is 24:2 and 55:1; Jer 44:12.

⁴⁷ See Ezek 27:12, 14, 16, 19 and 22.

purchasing of items,⁴⁸ and the corresponding noun ἀγορά refers to a marketplace.⁴⁹ Apart from its literal meaning where, for instance, slaves could be purchased on the slave market, this concept is also used figuratively.⁵⁰ For instance, Paul uses the term ἀγοράζω to illustrate the idea of the believers now belonging to God,⁵¹ and in Revelation the same term is used to express the idea of people being ‘purchased for God’.⁵² In Galatians there is another example of a figurative usage of this verb where Paul expresses the idea of Christ redeeming people from ‘the curse of the law’.⁵³ Thus, both in the LXX and in the NT, the term ἀγοράζω refers literally to an act of buying or purchasing of items, and the term ἀγορά in the NT refers to a marketplace. At the same time the NT uses this term figuratively in terms of people being ‘purchased’ for God, changing their ‘master’ and therefore belonging to God, and the picture of the purchasing of slaves from the slave market depicts the work of Christ on the cross.

Therefore, both the terms λύτρον and λυτρόομαι, and the terms ἀγορά and ἀγοράζω appear to be based on the same underlying principle of liberation; consequently, Christ is portrayed as a liberator and humans are liberated through change of ownership, as they now belong to God through Christ. Furthermore, the Book of Revelation also uses the verb λύω (loose, untie, release, set free) to illustrate Christ’s death,⁵⁴ demonstrating further that in the NT there is a continuity in the usage of the core principle of liberation in relation to the cross of Christ.

⁴⁸ See Mt 13:44-46, 21:12, 25:9 and 27:7; Mk 11:5, 15:46 and 16:1; Lk 14:18-19 and 17:28; Jn 6:5 and 13:29; Rev 3:18, 13:17 and 18:11.

⁴⁹ See Mt 20:3; Mk 7:4; Lk 7:32; Acts 16:19 and 17:17.

⁵⁰ This term also has a figurative meaning or ‘the analogy of buying a slave’s freedom for a price paid by a benefactor’. See Friberg Greek Lexicon.

⁵¹ See 1 Cor 6:20 and 7:23.

⁵² See Rev 5:9 and 14:3.

⁵³ See Gal 3:13.

⁵⁴ See Rev 1:5.

Apart from the term ‘ransom’ Christ also employed the term ‘forgiveness’ (ἄφεσις) to describe the meaning of his death on the cross.⁵⁵ This term is also used by Luke and Paul to describe the same idea of ‘forgiveness of sins’, and in Eph 1:7 and Col 1:14 the term ἄφεσις is closely linked with the term ἀπολύτρωσις, appearing to have the same meaning.⁵⁶ Curiously, Lk 4:18 uses the noun ἄφεσις to describe the idea of ‘deliverance’ of captives and ‘release’ of prisoners – the identical noun is translated in the NT both as forgiveness and as liberation, release or deliverance. This verse probably stems from the LXX version of Isaiah, where ἄφεσις carries the meaning of ‘liberty’.⁵⁷ In a few more instances in the LXX this term is also translated as ‘liberty’; this is the case in the passage in Leviticus referring to every 50th Year of Jubilee when all the land was to be returned to their original owners and all the slaves were released into freedom;⁵⁸ this is also the case in the passage in Deuteronomy referring to every 7th year when financial debts were to be cancelled and slaves were to be set free,⁵⁹ and in Jer 34:1-22 where the slaves in Jerusalem were also to be released.⁶⁰ The corresponding verb ἀφίημι is occasionally used both in the LXX and in the NT in the same manner as the noun ἄφεσις to describe the act of forgiving sins.⁶¹ Thus, just as it was the case with the terms λύτρον, λυτρόομαι, λύτρωσις, ἀπολύτρωσις, ἀντίλυτρον, ἀγορα, ἀγοράζω and λύω, it appears that the term ἄφεσις is also based on the concept of liberation. Consequently, the idea of liberation seems to be both the underlying concept behind Jesus’ understanding of the meaning of the

⁵⁵ See Mt 26:28.

⁵⁶ See Mk 1:4 and 3:29, Lk 3:3 and 24:47, Acts 2:38, 5:31, 10:43 and 26:18 (ἄφεσις). See also Eph 1:7 (τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν παραπτωμάτων) and Col 1:14 (τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν).

⁵⁷ ‘πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ’ ἐμέ σὺ εἵνεκεν ἔχρισέν με εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς ἀπέσταλκέν με ἰάσασθαι τοὺς συνεττριμμένους τῇ καρδίᾳ κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτους ἄφεσιν καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν’ Isa 61:1 [in LXX].

⁵⁸ See Lev 25:10 where the term ἄφεσις is translated as ‘liberty’.

⁵⁹ See Deut 15:1 where the term ἄφεσις is translated as ‘release’.

⁶⁰ See Jer 34 [chapter 41 in LXX] verses 8, 15 and 17 where the term ἄφεσις is translated as ‘liberty’.

⁶¹ See Ps 32:5 [31:5 in LXX] and 85:2 [84:3 in LXX]; Lk 5:20, 5:23 and 7:47-48; Jn 20:23; 1 Jn 2:12.

cross (λύτρον and ἄφεσις), and one of the core principles used to portray the idea of atonement in the NT.

As mentioned earlier in this section, Paul is the only one who links the ideas of justification and reconciliation to the cross of Christ. Moreover, in Rom 3:24-26, one of his key passages on atonement, Paul uses 3 terms to describe the work of Christ, one of which is ἱλαστήριον.⁶² Heb 9:5 is the only other occurrence of this term in the NT, its meaning being the 'lid' on the Ark of the Covenant. In the LXX the identical term ἱλαστήριον is used 28 times usually referring to the 'mercy seat' or the 'lid' on the Ark of the Covenant.⁶³ There are 4 occurrences of this term that are a bit more ambiguous, but these 4 still point to a physical object within the temple in Jerusalem.⁶⁴ Thus, out of a total of 30 occurrences in the (Greek) Bible, including the LXX (28 times) and the NT (2 times), ἱλαστήριον refers predominantly to the 'lid' on the Ark of the Covenant. Despite the weight of the biblical evidence which suggests that ἱλαστήριον is a physical object within the sanctuary or within the temple, there is a great disagreement regarding the interpretation of the single occurrence of this term in Rom 3:25. Brontos points out 3 different interpretations of the term ἱλαστήριον in Romans – 'propitiation' (change in God through appeasement on the cross), 'expiation' (change in humans through the cross), and 'mercy seat' or 'lid' on the Ark.⁶⁵ In order to 'help' the interpretation of this passage, some Bible translations add to it the word 'sacrifice' which does not exist in the Greek text.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, considering that the weight of the biblical evidence seems to tip the balance in favour of the third interpretation (the 'lid'), and the only other occurrence of this

⁶² See Rom 3:25

⁶³ See Ex 25:17-22; 31:7; 35:12; 38:5-8; Lev.16:2-15; Num 7:89; Amos 9:1; 4 Macc 17:22; Ezek 43:14-20

⁶⁴ See Amos 9:1, Ezek 43:14-17.

⁶⁵ See David A. Brontos, *Paul on the Cross: Reconstructing the Apostle's Story of Redemption* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), p. 126.

⁶⁶ For instance, NIV translates ἱλαστήριον as 'sacrifice of atonement'; NAS does not add the word sacrifice to the text, nonetheless, it still puts it into a footnote – 'propitiatory sacrifice'.

term in the NT (Heb 9:5) actually points to ‘the lid on the Ark’, the question is – what is the meaning of this object? In the Mosaic sanctuary this object had two purposes – a perpetual one, and an occasional one; the perpetual purpose of the ‘lid’ was to be the meeting place of God and man,⁶⁷ and its occasional purpose was to be sprinkled only once a year on the Day of Atonement.⁶⁸ The perpetual usage of the ‘lid’ was also to reveal God’s glory to his people, as his glory was continually ‘seated’ upon ἱλαστήριον for six months and nine days,⁶⁹ even before ἱλαστήριον was sprinkled with blood on the very first Day of Atonement.⁷⁰

MacLeod points out that the glory revealed in Jesus is related to the idea of God’s glory visibly manifested in the Old Testament Sanctuary; both the LXX and the NT in this instance use the same verb σκηνοῶ, and just as in the desert God asked the Israelites to make a sanctuary so that he could ‘dwell’ among them, in the same manner ‘the Word became flesh and made his *dwelling* among us’.⁷¹ Just as in the desert God’s glory was continually present among the Israelites by means of the sanctuary, so in the beginning of the 1st century God’s glory was continually present among his people by means of God’s embodiment in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, it appears that to limit the meaning of the word ἱλαστήριον simply and strictly to his sacrifice on the cross does not do full justice to this term. Moreover, the immediate context of Rom 3:25 appears to be focused on God’s justice or ‘righteousness’ as both this noun and its corresponding verb are used 8 times in Rom 3:20-26.⁷² Brunt points out that the

⁶⁷ ‘There above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you ...’ See Ex 25:22 and 30:6.

⁶⁸ See Lev 16:14-16.

⁶⁹ ‘So the tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month ... then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.’ See Ex 40:17 and 34.

⁷⁰ ‘On the tenth day of the seventh month ... atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of Israelites.’ Lev 16:29 and 34.

⁷¹ David J. MacLeod, ‘The Incarnation of the Word’ in *Biblioteca Sacra*, Volume 161, Number 641 (January - March 2004), pp. 76-78.

⁷² ‘διότι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιοθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, διὰ γὰρ νόμου ἐπίγνωσις ἁμαρτίας. Νυνὶ δὲ χωρὶς νόμου δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ πεφανέρωται μαρτυρουμένη ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν, δικαιοσύνη δὲ θεοῦ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας. οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν διαστολή, πάντες γὰρ ἥμαρτον καὶ ὑστεροῦνται τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ δικαιοῦμενοι δωρεὰν τῆ αὐτοῦ χάριτι διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ· ὃν προέθετο ὁ θεὸς ἱλαστήριον διὰ [τῆς]

role of a judge who executed justice in the OT was different from the role of a judge in a contemporary western society – while we see a judge as a person who handles only the administrative aspect of a court process, the OT Hebrew concept of a judge (specifically in the Book of Judges) assumed a direct bare-hands involvement through the liberation of the oppressed.⁷³ Thus, once again, it appears that the biblical concepts of justice, justification and judgment also appear to be somehow related to the idea of liberation, as are some of the key terms previously considered in this section.

Furthermore, it also needs to be pointed out that while some commentators interpret ἱλαστήριον strictly as Christ's sacrifice on the cross, other commentators suggest that in its wider biblical context this concept is related to the future eschatological judgment day, as portrayed in the cultic Day of Atonement.⁷⁴ It should be noted further that while Jesus did use the idea of justification, he never related it to his death on the cross – 'you are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts';⁷⁵ 'I tell you that this man (the tax collector) rather than the other (the Pharisee) went home justified before God';⁷⁶ 'for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned'.⁷⁷ Rather, Jesus uses the concept of ransom (λύτρον), and the concept of forgiveness (ἄφεσις) to describe the meaning of his death on the cross. As mentioned previously in this section, both concepts are closely linked with the idea of liberation.

The verb that corresponds to the noun ἱλαστήριον is ἱλάσκομαι and is used

πίστεως ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι εἰς ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ διὰ τὴν πάρεσιν τῶν προγεγονότων ἁμαρτημάτων ἐν τῇ ἀνοχῇ τοῦ θεοῦ, πρὸς τὴν ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν δίκαιον καὶ δικαιῶντα τὸν ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ.' Rom 3:20-26 (GNT).

⁷³ John C. Brunt, *Romans: Mercy for All* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1996), pp. 83-84.

⁷⁴ See Roy E. Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005). See also Gunnar Pedersen, *The Soteriology of Ellen G. White Compared with the Lutheran Formula of Concord* (1995).

⁷⁵ See Lk 16:15.

⁷⁶ See Lk 18:14.

⁷⁷ See Mt 12:37.

only twice in the NT; one of these occurrences is Lk 18:13 where this verb is translated as 'be merciful' in most Bibles.⁷⁸ In the LXX the term ἰλάσκομαι occurs in Ps 79:9 and is translated without consensus as 'purge' (KJV), 'forgive' (NIV), 'provide atonement' (NKJV).⁷⁹ Heb 2:17 also appears to lack a general agreement amongst the Bible translators considering that the term ἰλάσκομαι⁸⁰ is translated as 'reconciliation' (KJV), 'atonement' (NIV), 'propitiation' (NAS), 'sacrifice of atonement' [adding again the word 'sacrifice' which does not appear in the Greek text] (NRS). Taking into account the ambiguity of this verb, it would probably make sense to interpret it within the previously demonstrated wider background context of the biblical concept of liberation.

Likewise, there are only two occurrences of the noun ἰλασμός (both in the First Epistle of John) in the NT that correspond to the noun ἰλαστήριον.⁸¹ While some Bibles translate it as 'propitiation' (KJV and NAS), other bibles translate it as 'atoning sacrifice' (NIV and NRS) [yet again adding the word 'sacrifice' which does not appear in the Greek text]. In the LXX the identical term ἰλασμός is translated as 'atonement',⁸² 'forgiveness',⁸³ 'sin offering',⁸⁴ 'sin' (KJV) or 'shame' (NIV) or 'guilt' (NAS).⁸⁵ Again, because of ambiguity of the term ἰλασμός it would make sense to situate it within the larger biblical framework of the concept of liberation. Further occurrences of the related verb ἰλάσκομαι in LXX are mostly translated as 'to forgive', and in Ps 78:38 it is interesting to notice that through forgiveness (ἰλάσκομαι) God did not appease or propitiate his anger, but rather he 'restrained' his anger.⁸⁶ Again curiously, in Ex 32:14 God 'repented' (KJV)

⁷⁸ 'Ο θεός, ἰλάσθητί μοι τῷ ἁμαρτωλῷ.' Lk 18:13.

⁷⁹ '... καὶ ἰλάσθητι ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ἡμῶν.' Ps 79:9 [78:9 in LXX]

⁸⁰ See Heb 2:17.

⁸¹ See 1 Jn 2:2 and 4:10.

⁸² See Lev 25:9 and Num 5:8.

⁸³ See Ps 130:4 [129:4 in LXX].

⁸⁴ See Ezek 44:27.

⁸⁵ See Amos 8:14.

⁸⁶ See 2 Kgs 5:18 and Ps 78:38 [77:38 in LXX]; 2 Chr 6:30; Ps 25:11 [24:11 in LXX], Ps 65:3 [64:4 in LXX].

(*ιλάσκομαι*), or ‘relented’ (NIV), or ‘changed his mind’ (NAS and NRS) without any propitiation.⁸⁷

One more concept that needs to be considered is the concept of reconciliation, with the key relevant terms being the verbs *καταλλάσσω* and *ἀποκαταλλάσσω*, and the noun *καταλλαγή*; there are only five passages in the NT (used only by Paul), that use the term reconciliation when portraying Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, and in none of these occurrences can one find the idea that God needs to be reconciled to humans, but rather, one finds that reconciliation is unidirectional, as it is only humans who need to be ‘reconciled to’ God.⁸⁸ The concept of reconciliation suggests the end of a conflict and the idea of ‘making peace’, and for Paul, this ‘peace’ is not only for humans, or for ‘the world’, but, in some way the cross provides peace for the heavenly realm also.⁸⁹ Thus, for Paul the cross affects the heavenly realm and it has a cosmic dimension.

⁸⁷ ‘αὶ ἰλάσθη κύριος περὶ τῆς κακίας’ Ex 32:14.

⁸⁸ ‘κατηλλάγημεν τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ... ἵ οὐδὲν νῦν τὴν καταλλαγὴν ἐλάβομεν’ Rom 5:10-11; ‘ἵ γὰρ ἡ ἀποβολὴ αὐτῶν καταλλαγή κόσμου’ Rom 11:15; ‘ἀ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ καταλλάξαντος ἡμᾶς ἑαυτῷ διὰ Χριστοῦ... ὡς ὅτι θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ κόσμον καταλλάσσων ἑαυτῷ... καταλλάγητε τῷ θεῷ.’ 2 Cor 5:18-20; ‘καὶ ἀποκατάλλαξεν τοὺς ἀμφοτέρους ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ’ Eph 2:16; ‘καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ ἀποκατάλλαξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν, εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ... ἡνὶ δὲ ἀποκατήλλαξεν ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου’ Col 1:20-22.

⁸⁹ See Col 1:20.