

ATONEMENT AND PROPITIATION

Temple Language

Atonement refers to satisfying an injury or wrong, (the Hebrew verb kphr, meaning to atone for, has in it the idea of covering over of sins)

Propitiation refers to turning away God's anger or wrath.

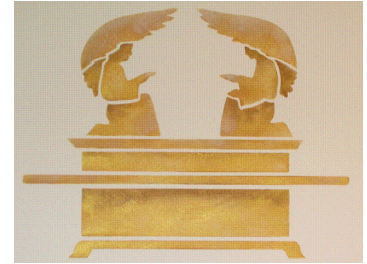
Both terms are language derived from the temple and altar.

Romans 3:25

"God presented [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood."

In this verse, "sacrifice of atonement" is the Greek word **hilasterion** (sometimes translated 'propitiation'), a word which refers to the "Atonement Cover" or "Mercy Seat" on the Ark of the Covenant. What does this mean?

The temple in Jerusalem was the place on earth where God dwelled. The temple was designed to communicate that sinful humans could not approach Him. The temple itself was made up of several courts. The outer courts or the Court of Gentiles was a place that anyone could enter, the



Court of Women was for God's people only, the Priest's Court was for offering sacrifices. A tall structure within the Priest's Court contained the Holy Place. This Holy Place was divided into two by a large curtain. Behind the large curtain was the Holy of Holies, where God dwelt on earth. No one could enter the Holy of Holies (except the High Priest once a year). The Holy of Holies contained the Ark of the Covenant. This ark was covered by the Mercy Seat (hilasterion). On top of the Mercy Seat were two angels (Cherubim) with outstretched wings. It was between the wings of these angels above the Mercy Seat that God Himself dwelt in inexpressible light.

The Ark contained three things: the tablets of the Ten Commandments, Aaron's Budding Staff, and Manna (see Hebrews 9). All three of these things were positive reminders of sin and rebellion. God's presence dwelt directly above these reminders of sin. How could this be?

The Old Testament is full of death, blood, and sacrifices. (e.g., see 1 Kings 8:62ff). The message of this parade of sacrifices is that death is the punishment for sin. If the sinner would not die, there must be a substitute to satisfy the demands of God's justice. Once a year on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest entered into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice on the Mercy Seat. Thus, when God looked down He did not see the people's sin, instead he saw the blood of the sacrifice. This blood covered over the people's sin and turned away or satisfied God's wrath.

This was merely a picture or an advanced presentation of what Jesus would accomplish. In His death, Jesus became a true substitute for us. He died in our place. His blood covers our sin and turns away God's wrath.