



5 MINUTE LESSONS ON THE KINGDOM OF GOD

What Is Propitiation?

“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood...”
(Romans 3:25 KJV)

In Greek culture, the word group denoting “propitiation” carried with it the idea of acting in some way to avert the terrible, destructive powers of the gods and, if possible, to win the gods over to act favorably. The Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) chose this word group when translating kippur. Thus, the NIV’s “atonement” reflects the Old Testament, and the NASB’s “propitiation” reflects the Greek emphasis. When we look into the New Testament passages themselves, we learn much about how the coming of Jesus filled the Old Testament sacrifices with special meaning. (Expository Dictionary of Bible Words, page 83)

Vine’s Greek Lexicon, page 895, states, “Propitiation” (hilaskomai) was used amongst the Greeks with the significance to make the gods propitious, to appease, propitiate, inasmuch as their good will was not conceived as their natural attitude, but something to be earned first. This use of the word is foreign to the Greek Bible, with respect to God, whether in the Septuagint or in the New Testament. It is never used of any act whereby man brings God into a favorable attitude or gracious disposition. It is God who is propitiated by the sacrifice of His Son. He has so dealt with sin that He can show mercy to the believing sinner in the removal of his guilt and the remission of his sins.

In Luke 18:13, it signifies to be propitious or merciful to the person as the object of the verb.

*“And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, **God be merciful (mercy-seated) to me a sinner.** I tell you, this man went down to his house justified...”*
(Luke 18:13-14a)

Through the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, he who believes upon Him is by God’s own act delivered from justly deserved wrath, and comes under grace. “Propitiation” means the appeasement of divine wrath by a sacrificial offering. Some deny that the Bible contains this idea because they do not think a loving God would ever personally exercise wrath against His creatures. But the idea is clearly implied by the Greek word for “propitiation,” and is the only saving solution to the fact of God’s wrath against sin that Paul developed in Romans 1:18-3:20.

At the heart of the gospel is the fact that if Christ did not bear the wrath of God that we deserved, then that wrath is still stored up for us (See Romans 2:5, 8; 3:5; 5:9; Ephesians 5:6; Revelation 6:16-17) (Spirit Filled Life Bible, page 1691). For this propitiation to be effective in the life of the individual, faith must be present (Romans 3:25-26) (Wycliffe Bible Commentary, page 516).

“Propitiation” is translated by the following phrases: propitiation (KJV), a sacrifice of atonement (NIV), the sacrifice for sin (NLT), a way to forgive sin (NCV), as the means of saving us (LB), Christ is the throne of mercy (GW), as a mercy seat and propitiation (AMP), etc.

A modern parable: I was driving west on highway 18, near my old home town in northeastern Oklahoma. As I was exceeding the speed limit, driving to my father’s ranch, I suddenly looked back and saw a flashing red light. It was an Oklahoma Highway patrolman. I was stopped and summoned to appear before a judge at the Pawnee County Courthouse.

When I stood before the judge, I discovered he was an old friend of my family’s. I was sure that my ill fortune was going to be turned for the better. As the judge greeted me, he kindly said, “You know I would like to show you mercy, I would like to show you grace, but I cannot, in order to be a just judge.”

He sentenced me to pay a fine of \$100.00 or spend one day in jail. Knowing that I did not have the money, I was ready to serve one day in jail. Then the judge did something quite unusual. He took off his robe as judge, stepped down from the bench, and reached into his pocket. He gave me \$100.00 and said, “Pay your fine!” In his justice he sentenced me, but in his mercy he paid my debt.

God in His justice has sentenced us (the wages of sin is death — Romans 6:23), but in His mercy, He paid our debt. Through “propitiation,” Christ is the place of mercy (the mercy seat), the means of saving us, the sacrifice for our sins. Will you accept His gift of life and come follow Him?

Questions

1 “Propitiation” is never used of any act whereby man brings God into a favorable attitude or gracious disposition.

True or False

2 “Propitiation” means the appeasement of divine wrath by a sacrificial offering.

True or False

3 Through “propitiation,” Christ is the place of mercy (the mercy seat), and the means of mercy, the sacrifice for our sins.

True or False

4 Will you call on His mercy today?

We want to hear from you!

We would love to hear your feedback on these lessons and how you use them in your own study or in discipling others. If you have any thoughts, stories, testimonies, comments, or questions we would love to hear them!

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Answer Key

- 1** “Propitiation” is never used of any act whereby man brings God into a favorable attitude or gracious disposition.

True

It is God who is propitiated by the sacrifice of His Son. He has so dealt with sin that He can show mercy to the believing sinner in the removal of his guilt and the remission of his sins.

- 2** “Propitiation” means the appeasement of divine wrath by a sacrificial offering.

True

“Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!” (Romans 5:9 NIV)

- 3** Through “propitiation,” Christ is the place of mercy (the mercy seat), and the means of mercy, the sacrifice for our sins.

True

“¹³Meanwhile the tax man, slumped in the shadows, his face in his hands, not daring to look up, said, “God, give mercy. Forgive me, a sinner.”

¹⁴Jesus commented, ‘This tax man, not the other, went home made right with God...’ (Luke 18:13-14 The Message Bible)

- 4** Will you call on His mercy today?

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:13 King James Version)