

PSA Examined**Article Series:****Article #6:****What is
Propitiation?**

PSA Series – What is Propitiation in the Bible? What do the underlying Greek words mean?

Description**PSA Examined****Article Series:****Article #6:****What is
Propitiation?**

Welcome to the most “in the weeds” article that I’ve ever

done. This article is essentially a massive word study of the 4 Greek words related to “propitiation” in the New Testament. Because of that, I’ll have a summary at/near the beginning, followed by all the research to “show my work” so you can confirm the conclusion. (*And you can see how I think the relevant verses should be translated under the final “conclusion” heading.*)

This is the 6th article in [my series on “Penal Substitutionary Atonement” \(PSA\)](#), investigating if it’s true according to the Bible or not. The 4th covered [what is atonement](#), and the 5th covered [if the Day of Atonement and/or sin offerings support PSA](#); both of those will lend context to this one, especially the 4th one on what Atonement is. You might also like my article: [How To Do a Word Study of a Greek or Hebrew Word in the Bible](#) if you want to double-check my work, or are simply interested in learning such a skill.

Without further ado, we’ll begin.

Summary: What is Propitiation?

Fundamentally, its biblical usage means “to reconcile”, or “to bring reconciliation”, or “the means of reconciliation”. There are of course nuances of meaning, but that’s the primary sense. It seems that

the normal New Testament word for “reconcile” wasn’t used in the “propitiation passages” because the Greek words translated “propitiation” were used in the Septuagint (*An early translation of the Old Testament into Greek*). **In the Septuagint, the Greek words we translate “propitiation” were used to mean “reconcile” or “forgive/pardon” the overwhelming vast majority of the time.**

Interestingly, there’s also a connection to sin offerings and the Day of Atonement. One noun form of the Greek word was almost exclusively used of the lid of the ark of the covenant in the Septuagint, and **we translate that word “mercy seat”** in modern translations. **The other noun form was used to mean “sin offering” at least once**, which of course links with the Day of Atonement because the blood of the sin offering was sprinkled on the “mercy seat” (*the lid of the ark*).

The verb form is *almost* always used to translate the Hebrew verb for “forgive/pardon” in the Septuagint, except when it’s used to translate the Hebrew word for “reconcile”. A strengthened verb form is used to translate the Hebrew word for “reconcile” (*kaphar*) nearly 90 times. The adjective form is usually used to translate the Hebrew verb for “forgive/pardon” with the formulation: “(was/is/will be) forgiving”.

Again, the Biblical usage is almost entirely about reconciliation, which you can see in the rest of this article.

Here’s an outline of the article, and we’ll go through each section in detail. (*You can expand the table of contents above to jump to each section if you like, though each does build on the previous somewhat.*)

- Dictionary definitions of the English word
 - Modern theological meaning
 - Modern “normal” meaning
 - Definitions from centuries ago
- Lexical definitions of the underlying Greek words
- Use in Bible translations
 - Use in early English translations
 - How the word was translated into Latin
- How each word is used in the Septuagint
- How the word is used by the early church fathers
- Conclusion

What the English word “propitiation” means

Normally, I start by quoting a lexicon and then looking at usage. However, **most lexicons use the word “propitiation” to define the underlying Greek words, so the lexicons won’t be as useful unless we know what the English word “propitiation” means.** Thus, we’ll look at the English word first, then look at Greek lexical definitions later.

We’ll start with theologically oriented dictionaries, then more general/vernacular ones, then we’ll look at very old dictionaries to see if the word’s meaning has changed over time.

The modern theological definition of propitiation

I pulled these from a Bible dictionary and two popular Christian websites that always seem to show up near the top of the search results for me.

Easton’s Bible Dictionary – Propitiation

...

In 1 John 2:2 ; 4:10 , **Christ is called the “propitiation for our sins.” Here a different Greek word is used (hilasmos). Christ is “the propitiation,” because by his becoming our substitute and assuming our obligations he expiated our guilt, covered it, by the vicarious punishment which he endured.** (Compare Hebrews 2:17 , where the expression “make reconciliation” of the A.V. is more correctly in the RSV “make propitiation.”)

[Source.](#)

The popular Christian website “Got Questions” has this as the introductory paragraph to their article on propitiation:

The word propitiation carries the basic idea of appeasement or satisfaction, specifically toward God. **Propitiation is a two-part act that involves appeasing the wrath of an offended person and being reconciled to him.**

[Source.](#)

One website that seems to always pop up in such searches (*for me*) is Ligonier Ministries:

Propitiation describes the means by which the wrath of God is turned away from us.

...

Ultimately, these are types or pictures of what the Lord Jesus Christ would do. This is why Jesus’ words on the cross are so significant—“My God, My God, why am I forsaken?” The answer is **He is the one on whom our sins have been laid as a propitiatory sacrifice to absorb the judgment of God against us so that we might be set free**

[Source.](#)

Okay, so judging from those sources, “propitiation” is effectively PSA in a nutshell. According to modern Christians, it means to absorb “vicarious punishment”, to “appease wrath”, and to “absorb the judgment of God”. Again, these sources effectively say that it’s PSA in a nutshell.

So, now we’ll look at non-religious dictionaries to see what they say.

Modern Dictionary definitions of “propitiation”

We’ll start with Merriam-Webster’s dictionary:

1: **the act of gaining or regaining the favor or goodwill of someone or something** : the act of propitiating : APPEASEMENT
 a sacrifice in *propitiation* of the gods
 ... she showed every possible desire to conciliate him, and there was an air of humble *propitiation* in all she did, such as I have seen pervade the bearing of a child towards a hard master.
 —Charles Dickens

2: **something that propitiates or appeases**
specifically : **an atoning sacrifice**

[Source.](#)

And now, dictionary.com’s definition of “propitiate” (*the verb form of “propitiation”, since the definition of the noun form basically points to the verb form*).

to make favorably inclined; appease; conciliate.

Antonyms: arouse, anger

[Source.](#)

And here’s the Cambridge dictionary (*emphasis original*.)

the act of pleasing and making calm a god or person who is annoyed with you:

- *The purpose of these sculptures was propitiation of the gods.*
- *Though he might have accepted her gesture as propitiation, he was still indignant.*

[Source.](#)

Okay, so it seems like the theological definitions aren't the same as the modern, non-religious definitions; however, they aren't radically different either.

The first two clearly mean to make someone favorably inclined toward you, but notice that Merriam-Webster says "**the act of gaining or regaining**". That is, it can mean "to appease" because someone is angry with you, but it can also mean to make someone who is neutral toward you favorable toward you. Dictionary.com seems to support that as well since it can mean both "to make favorably inclined" and "appease". Again, both work.

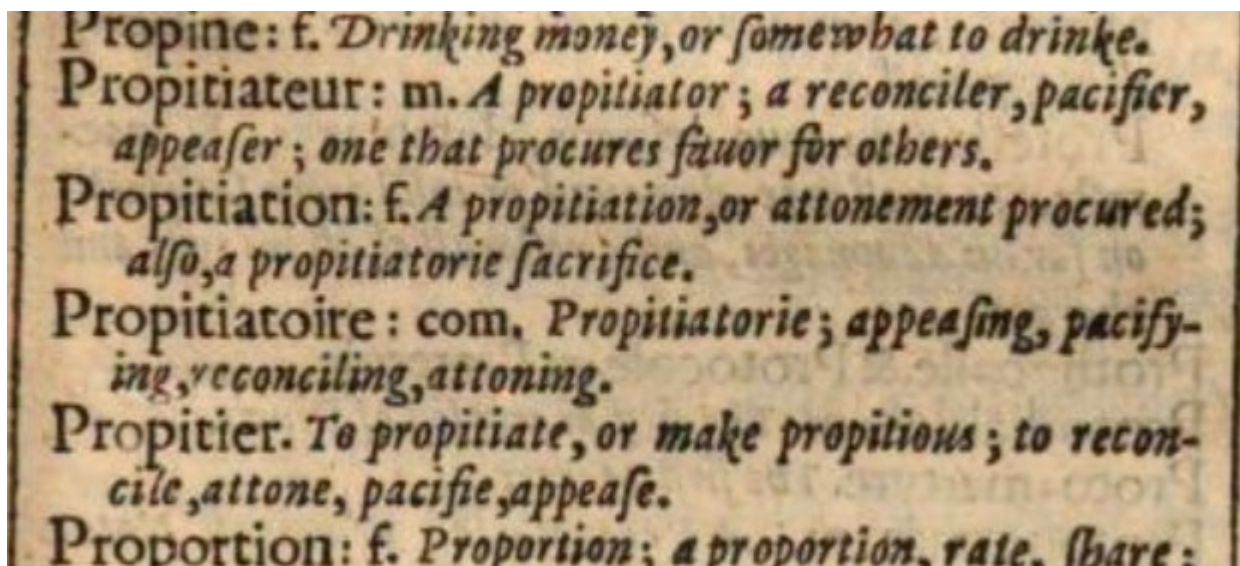
Conversely, the Cambridge dictionary seems to directly imply that it only means to regain favor/appease.

Now that we've seen more modern definitions, we'll look at older definitions.

Old dictionary definitions of "propitiation"

The earliest dictionary I could find with an entry for "propitiation" is from "*A dictionarie of the French and English tongues*" by Randle Cotgrave, published in 1611. Notably, that's the same year the King James Bible was first published. You can read the whole thing online [here](#), but I've taken a screenshot of the relevant entry.

Note: the letter "s" often looks like an "f" in the picture.



Notice the following definitions from the various forms of the word:

- Reconcile
- “One that procures favor for others”
- pacify/appease
- “attone” (*a variant spelling of “atone”, which means to “make at one”, as we saw in [my article on “atonement”](#).*)

Samuel Johnson’s “Dictionary of the English Language” from 1785 also has an entry. You can read it online [here](#), on page 410.

Note: again, the letter “s” often looks like an “f” in the picture.

PROPI'TIABLE. *adj.* [from *propitiate.*]

Such as may be induced to favour; such as may be made propitious.

To PROPI'TIATE. *v. a.* [*propitio, Lat.*]

To induce to favour; to gain; to conciliate; to make propitious.

You, her priest, declare
What off'rings may *propitiate* the fair,
Rich orient pearl, bright stones that ne'er decay,
Or polish'd lines which longer last than they.

Waller.

They believe the affairs of human life to be managed by certain spirits under him, whom they endeavour to *propitiate* by certain rites. *Stillingfleet.*

Vengeance shall pursue the inhuman coast,
Till they *propitiate* thy offended ghost. *Dryden.*

Let fierce Achilles, dreadful in his rage,
The god *propitiate*, and the pest assuage. *Pope.*

PROPITIA'TION. *n. s.* [*propiciation, Fr.* from *propitiate.*]

1. The act of making propitious.
2. The atonement; the offering by which propitiousness is obtained.

He is the *propitiation* for the sins of the whole world. *1 John*

PROPITIA'TOR. *n. s.* [from *propitiate.*]

One that propitiates.

PROPI'TIATORY. *adj.* [*propiciatoire, Fr.*

According to this much older dictionary, “to propitiate” means “to induce to favour”, which can include the idea of reconciling. Several of the examples used seem to indicate that — like Merriam-Webster’s definition — it means to gain favor, and it can include regaining lost favor. **However, older usage doesn’t require a meaning of “regaining lost favor” — much less “appeasing wrath” — as the modern Christian theological dictionaries claim.**

That’s important.

Why?

Because it demonstrates that modern theological dictionaries understand “propitiation” differently than the translators who first used it in Bible translation.

That is, when “propitiation” was first used in Bible translation, it simply meant to gain favor, which could include regaining lost favor (*i.e. reconciliation*), and likely often did. However, modern religious usage says it not only must be about regaining lost favor, but also about appeasing wrath.

That’s a very significant change.

It’s good to know that the meaning of the word has changed over time (*which we’ll look at more under the next heading*) because it shows a shift. Thus, the modern Christian understanding of the term has changed from the original intent of using it in translation. That makes modern theological definitions suspect; not necessarily wrong, but suspect.

Now, you’ll soon see that the idea of reconciliation does indeed seem to be central to the Greek words translated “propitiation”. However, you’ll also see that the idea of “appeasing wrath” seems entirely absent from them and their usage. **Thus, it does seem that “propitiation” was chosen — at least partially — because it contains the idea of reconciliation.**

Etymology

Moving on slightly from dictionaries, we’ll look at the word origins from etymology.com. (*For those who don’t know, “etymology” simply refers to a word’s origin*). Here are the entries for the relevant words:

propitiation (n.)

late 14c., propiciacioun, “**atonement, expiation**,” from Late Latin propitiationem (nominative propitiatio) “**an atonement**,” noun of action from past-participle stem of Latin propitiare “appease, propitiate,” **from propitius “favorable, gracious, kind, well-disposed.”** The current explanation of this (as of de Vaan) is that it represents *propre-tio-, from PIE *propro “on and on, ever further” (source also of Sanskrit pra-pra “on and on,” Greek pro-pro “before, on and on”), from root *per- (1) “forward,” hence “in front of, toward, near.” It is thus related to

Latin prope “near.”

Earliest recorded form of the word in English is propitiatorium “the mercy seat, place of atonement” (c. 1200), translating Greek hilasterion. **The meaning “that which propitiates or appeases, a propitiatory gift or offering” is from 1550s.**

[Source.](#)

Please read the last sentence again, because it explicitly states what we’ve already seen; **the definition of “appease” came later.** It wasn’t part of the word’s meaning when it was first used in Bible translation. Again, reconciliation seems central to the word, but the meaning of “appease” only appeared *after* it was already being used in translation.

propitiate (v.)

“**appease and render favorable,**” **1580s**, a back-formation from propitiation and in part from propitiate (adj.), from Latin propitiatus, past participle of propitiare “appease, propitiate.” Related: Propitiated; propitiating; propitiatingly; propitiable (1550s).

[Source.](#)

propitiatory (adj.)

“having the power or intent to effect propitiation,” 1550s, **from Late Latin propitiarius “atoning, reconciling,”** from propitiatus, past participle of propitiare “appease, propitiate” (see propitiation). **Earlier in English as a noun, propiciatorie, c. 1300, “the mercy seat, lid or cover of the ark of the covenant,”** from Late Latin propitiatorium (translating Greek hilasterion in Bible); noun use of neuter singular of propitiarius.

[Source.](#)

So again, we have the ideas of “atonement” (*at-one-ment*) and “reconciling”. If you remember from [the article on atonement](#), atonement includes the idea of reconciliation. However, it seems that until very recently, “propitiation” also included the idea of making someone favorably disposed toward you, even if he wasn’t upset with you.

It’s also worth noting the etymology of our words “hilarious” and “hilarity” are related

hilarity (n.)

mid-15c., from Latin hilaritatem (nominative hilaritas) “cheerfulness, gaiety, merriment,” from hilaris “cheerful, merry,” from Greek hīlaros “cheerful, merry, joyous,” related to hilaos “graceful, kindly,” hilaskomai “to propitiate, appease, reconcile,” and probably from a suffixed form of a PIE root *selh- “reconcile” (source also of Latin solari “to comfort”).

In ancient Rome, Hilaria (neuter plural of hilaris) were a class of holidays, times of pomp and rejoicing; there were public ones in honor of Cybele at the spring equinoxes as well as private ones on the day of a marriage or a son’s birth.

Again, the word seems to have originally meant to be favorable or to increase your favor with someone or something, which could include — but didn’t require — the idea of reconciling. (*Increasing your favor with someone who wasn’t favorably disposed toward you.*)

Summary of the English word’s definition

Based on what we’ve seen so far, here are the two primary understandings of “propitiation”

- The exclusively modern Christian/theological usage which effectively defines it as: “Appeasing the wrath of an angry God”
- The near-unanimous historical and non-religious meaning, which is effectively: “To make someone favorably disposed toward you”, which often but not always included the idea of reconciling.

It seems like propitiation’s definition slowly changed over time in Christian theological circles, with a progression like this:

1. To increase your favor with someone, sometimes with the idea of reconciliation.
2. To increase your favor with someone by reconciling
3. To reconcile when someone is angry with you
4. To appease someone who is angry with you, which allows reconciliation
5. To appease God’s anger against you, which allows reconciliation
6. To appease God’s wrath, which allows reconciliation

This is just my own personal impression after doing a lot of research.

I can’t point to specific points where the word’s meaning changed other than the information above. However, the progression makes sense when viewed through the lens of PSA. I don’t think it’s hard to see how the meaning slowly morphed over time to conform to PSA, especially since the steps are relatively small. That also explains why the non-religious use of the word is still very similar to the original meaning, since the secular world is much less influenced by Christianity.

Next, we’ll look at the underlying Greek words.

The Greek words underlying “propitiation”

The reason I say “words” and not “word” is because there are four related words that are relevant to the topic, two or three of which are actually translated “propitiation” (*depending on your translation*). By related, I mean that these four words all belong to the same “word family”, which we’ll need to talk about.

The propitiation “word family”

What do I mean by “word family”?

Take the English word “fly” for example (*the action, not the insect*). Our word “fly” means to move through the air while not physically connected to the ground. However, it also has a participle form: “flying”, which tells us that something is engaged in the action of flying, for example, “the flying rock”. We also have the noun form “flight” which speaks of the action of flying. There’s also “flier”, which is a person who flies.

You get the point.

Greek is also this way.

The word “propitiation” is the noun form of the word, analogous to “flight”. However, it also has a second noun form, a verb form, and an adjective form, for 4 forms total in the New Testament. (*Later, we’ll also look at a 5th form that’s not used in the NT.*) Counting every member of the “word family”, there are 8 total uses in the New Testament. (*2 of each form*)

Here are all of those uses in the NASB 95.

Verb form: “?????????” ([hilaskomai](#), pronounced “hil-as’-kom-ahee”).

Luke 18:13 “But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, **be merciful** (*hilaskomai*) to me, the sinner!’

Hebrews 2:17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, **to make propitiation** (*hilaskomai*) for the sins of the people.

Masculine noun: “?????????” ([hilasmos](#), pronounced: “hil-as-mos”).

1 John 2:2 and He Himself is the **propitiation** (*hilasmos*) for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the **propitiation** (*hilasmos*) for our sins.

Neuter Noun: “?????????” (*hilastérion*, pronounced: “hil-as-tay’-ree-on”).

Romans 3:25 whom God displayed publicly as a **propitiation** (*hilastérion*) in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;

Hebrews 9:5 and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the **mercy seat** (*hilastérion*); but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

Adjective form: “?????” (*hileós*, pronounced “hil’-eh-océ”)

Matthew 16:22 Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “God **forbid** (*hileós*) it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.”

Hebrews 8:12 “FOR I WILL **BE MERCIFUL** (*hileós*) TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE.”

The reason we are looking at other forms of this word is to get a sense of what the word itself means. For example, if we were unsure what the word “flight” meant, then we could look at how “flying” and “flier” are used in sentences to get an idea of what the noun form “flight” means. **We’ll do that in this article. Obviously the usage of the noun form of propitiation will take precedence, but the other forms will help lend some clarity.**

Next, we’ll look at the lexical definitions of all four words.

Note: many of the definitions include expiate/expiation We looked at what that means in [the article on atonement](#), so please see that article if you want to know more about it. As a refresher, here’s how an older dictionary defines it:

EXPIATE

1. To annul the guilt of a crime by subsequent acts of piety; to atone for.

Modern theological dictionaries will define it as basically PSA in a nutshell, which means “expiate” has changed meaning over time as well, which we saw in the article on atonement... ..but I digress. We’ll look at the lexical definitions of the Greek words for “propitiation” now.

Lexical definition

We’ll start with one of the most respected modern English-Greek Lexicons: **BDAG** (*That is, the “Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich” lexicon*). It’s generally considered the best lexicon for Koine Greek, which is why we’re starting there.

Sadly, I can’t copy/paste a link to a source because it’s expensive and not available for free online anywhere. Thus, I have my paper copy in front of me and I’ll manually transcribe the relevant entries, trying to make sure I get even the formatting correct. Afterward, I’ll of course link to other, non-BDAG sources so you do have something else to see that can be sourced. For BDAG specifically, I’ll only be copying the short definitions and any relevant commentary on them, since again I need to manually transcribe them.

Verb form: “?????????” (*hilaskomai*)

1. *propitiate, conciliate*
 - Pass. *be propitiated, be merciful or gracious*
2. *expiate*

Masculine noun: “?????????” (*hilasmos*)

1. *expiation, propitiation*
2. *sin-offering*

Neuter Noun: “?????????????” (*hilastérion*)

- *that which expiates or propitiates, concr. a means of expiation, gift to procure expiation*
 - *The LXX uses ?. of the lid of the ark of the covenant, which was sprinkled w. the blood of the sin offering on the Day of Atonement (...)* So Hb 9:5 transl. *mercy seat*

Adjective form: “?????” (*hileós*)

1. gracious, merciful

Now, **most other lexicons are substantially similar**, with the exception that some specifically mention that “propitiation” means to appease God’s wrath. (*Which we’ve already seen wasn’t the original meaning of the word when it first entered Bible translation, but rather the meaning changed over time in Christian theological circles.*) **Because of that, and because BDAG is considered the gold standard, I won’t copy/paste any more lexical definitions here, with one exception.** However, if you are interested, you can find them at the links below:

- Verb form: “?????????” ([hilaskomai](#))
- Masculine noun: “?????????” ([hilasmos](#))
- Neuter Noun: “?????????????” ([hilastérion](#))
- Adjective form: “?????” ([hileós](#))

Now, **here’s the one exception: [Bill Mounce’s dictionary](#)**, available on his website. For those who don’t know who Bill Mounce is, he literally wrote some of the Greek language textbooks used in seminaries today. Fortunately, his dictionary is online for free and his definitions are actually slightly more helpful than BDAG.

Verb form: “?????????????” (*hilaskomai*)

Gloss:

(mid.) to make atonement for, with a focus on the means for accomplishing forgiveness, resulting in reconciliation; **(pass.)** to have mercy on, be merciful to

Definition:

to appease, render propitious; in NT to expiate, make an atonement or expiation for, Heb. 2:17; ??????????, be gracious, show mercy, pardon, Lk. 18:13*

[Source.](#)

Notice that Bill Mounce specifies that it means “to have mercy on” in the Greek passive voice, while in the Greek middle voice it means something similar to reconciliation. **The grammatical voice changes the meaning, which is important.** And by the way, this isn’t unusual in Greek; many words are like that.

Masculine noun: “?????????” (*hilasmos*)

Gloss:

atoning sacrifice, **the means of forgiveness**; traditionally propitiation

Definition:

atoning sacrifice, **sin offering**, propitiation, expiation; one who makes propitiation/expiation, 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10*

[Source.](#)

Now, notice that both Bill Mounce's dictionary and BDAG include "sin offering" as a definition. We'll look at the reason for that later when we look at the word's use in the Septuagint.

Neuter Noun: "?????????" (*hilastérion*)

Gloss:

atoning sacrifice; atonement cover, **the place where sins are forgiven**; traditionally propitiation or mercy seat

Definition:

the cover of the ark of the covenant, the mercy-seat, the place of propitiation, Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:5*

[Source.](#)

As you'll see when we look at this word's use in the Septuagint, it's effectively always translated "mercy seat", which means the cover/lid of the ark.

Adjective form: "?????" (*hileós*)

Gloss:

forgiving, gracious; **(may God be) gracious!, God forbid!**

Definition:

propitious, favorable, merciful, gracious, Heb. 8:12; **from the Hebrew, ????? ??? (? ????) God have mercy on thee, God forbid, far be it from thee, Mt. 16:22***

[Source.](#)

Next, we'll look at how these four words were translated into other languages.

Use in Bible translations

We'll look at how these four Greek words were translated into other languages to help us understand what other Christians thought the word meant through the ages. We'll cover older English translations first, and then Latin translations.

Translations in the earliest bible versions

Again, there are 8 verses in the New Testament where the "word family" of propitiation is used. We'll look at them now in some of the oldest English translations to get a sense of what *they thought it meant* hundreds of years ago when the Bible was first being translated into English. **These translations were done before English spelling became standardized, so some of the spelling is... well, let's call it "creative"**. If you ever wondered why you were forced to learn spelling in school, you probably won't wonder after reading these.

Luke 18:13

Geneva Bible of 1587: But the Publican standing a farre off, woulde not lift vp so much as his eyes to heauen, but smote his brest, saying, O God, **be mercifull** to me a sinner.

Bishops' Bible of 1568: And the publicane standyng a farre of, woulde not lyft vp his eyes to heauen, but smote vpon his brest, saying: God **be mercifull** to me a sinner.

Coverdale Bible of 1535: And the publican stode afarre of, and wolde not lift vp his eyes to heauen, but smote vpon his brest, and sayde: God **be thou mercyfull** vnto me synner.

Tyndale Bible of 1526: And the publican stode afarre of and wolde not lyfte vp his eyes to heven but smote his brest saying: God **be mercyfull** to me a synner.

Notably, this is almost identical to modern translations.

Hebrews 2:17

Geneva Bible of 1587: Wherefore in all things it behoued him to be made like vnto his brethren, that hee might be mercifull, and a faithfull hie Priest in things concerning God, that he might **make reconciliation** for the sinnes of the people.

Bishops' Bible of 1568: Wherefore, in all thinges it became him to be made lyke vnto his brethren, that he myght be mercyfull, and a faythfull hye priest in thynges concernyng God,

for **to purge** the peoples sinnes.

Coverdale Bible of 1535: Wherefore in all thinges it became him to be made like vnto his brethren, that he mighte be mercyfull and a faithfull hye prest in thinges concernynge God, to **make agrement** for the synnes of ye people.

Tyndale Bible of 1526: Wherefore in all thynges it became him to be made lyke vnto his brethre that he myght be mercifull and a faythfull hye preste in thynges concernynge god for **to pourge** the peoples synnes.

1 John 2:2

Geneva Bible of 1587: And he is the **reconciliation** for our sinnes: and not for ours onely, but also for the sinnes of the whole world.

Bishops' Bible of 1568: And he is ye **attonement** for our sinnes: not for our sinnes only, but also for the sinnes of all the worlde.

Coverdale Bible of 1535: and he it is that **optayneth grace** for oure synnes: not for oure synnes onely, but also for the synnes of all the worlde.

Tyndale Bible of 1526: and he it is that **obteyneth grace** for oure synnes: not for oure synnes only: but also for the synnes of all the worlde.

1 John 4:10

Geneva Bible of 1587: Herein is that loue, not that we loued God, but that he loued vs, and sent his Sonne to be **a reconciliation** for our sinnes.

Bishops' Bible of 1568: Herein is loue, not that we loued God, but that he loued vs, and sent his sonne to be **the agrement** for our sinnes.

Coverdale Bible of 1535: Herein is loue, not that we loued God, but that he loued vs, and sent his sonne **to make agrement** for oure synnes.

Tyndale Bible of 1526: Herin is love not that we loved god but that he loved vs and sent his sonne **to make agrement** for oure sinnes.

(Note: I think the sense of "to make agreement" is similar to reconciliation according to an earlier usage, but I can't verify that 100%.)

Romans 3:25

Geneva Bible of 1587: Whom God hath set forth to be a **reconciliation** through faith in his blood to declare his righteousnes, by the forgiuenesse of the sinnes that are passed,

Bishops' Bible of 1568: Whom God hath set foorth to be a **propitiatio**, through fayth in his blood, to declare his ryghteousnes, in that he forgeueth the sinnes that are past,

Coverdale Bible of 1535: whom God hath set forth for a **Mercyseate** thorow faith in his bloude, to shewe the righteousnes which avayleth before him, in that he forgeueth the synnes, which were done before vnder the sufferaunce of God, which he suffred,

Tyndale Bible of 1526: whom God hath made a **seate of mercy** thorow faith in his bloud to shewe ye rightewesnes which before him is of valoure in yt he forgeveth ye synnes yt are passed which God dyd suffre

Hebrews 9:5

Geneva Bible of 1587: And ouer the Arke were the glorious Cherubims, shadowing the **mercie seat**: of which things we will not nowe speake particularly.

Bishops' Bible of 1568: And ouer it, the Cherubins of glorie, shadowyng the **mercie seate**: Of which thynges we can not nowe speake particulerlie.

Coverdale Bible of 1535: Aboue therin were the Cherubins off glory ouershadowyng the **Mercyseate**: Of which thinges it is not now to speake perticularly.

Tyndale Bible of 1526: Over the arcke were the cherubis of glory shadowyng the **seate of grace**. Of which thynges we wyll not now speake perticularly.

Matthew 16:22

Geneva Bible of 1587: Then Peter tooke him aside, and began to rebuke him, saying, Master, **pitie** thy selfe: this shall not be vnto thee.

Bishops' Bible of 1568: And when Peter had taken him aside, he began to rebuke hym, saying: Lorde, **fauour** thy selfe, this shall not be vnto thee.

Coverdale Bible of 1535: But Peter toke him asyde, and beganne to rebuke him, sayenge: LORDE, **fauoure** thy self, let not this happen vnto the.

Tyndale Bible of 1526: But Peter toke him asyde and began to rebuke him sayenge:

master **faver** thy sylfe this shall not come vnto the.

Hebrews 8:12

Geneva Bible of 1587: For **I will bee mercifull** to their vnrighteousnes, and I wil remember their sinnes and their iniquities no more.

Bishops' Bible of 1568: For **I wyll be mercyfull** to their vnrighteousnes, and their sinnes and their iniquities wyll I thynke vpon no more.

Coverdale Bible of 1535: for **I wil be mercifull** ouer their vnrighteousnesses: And on their synnes & on their iniquyties wyl I not thynke enymore.

Tyndale Bible of 1526: For **I wilbe mercifull** over their vnrightwesnes and on their synnes and on their iniquities.

The major meanings that stand out to me are:

- “make agreement”
- reconciliation
- seat of grace
- mercy seat
- atonement (“*at-one-ment*”, which means to reconcile, as we saw in [the article on atonement.](#))

At this point, I’m guessing that you’re starting to get a general sense of what the word means based on how it’s translated. The meaning seems to be very similar to the modern non-religious definition, especially the “reconciliation” aspect.

Next, we’ll move on to Latin translations.

Use in Latin translations

Primarily we’ll look at the Latin Vulgate, which was *the* Bible of the western church from the 5th century until the 16th century. So here is how the appropriate words are translated into Latin, and the meanings of those words.

The verb form:

propitiare

- to propitiate

-
- to **render favorable**
 - to **win over**
 - to **sooth (feelings)**

[Source.](#)

The Latin translates the two Greek noun forms as a single Latin noun, which has these meanings:

- **atonement**
- propitiation
- **appeasement**

[Source.](#)

Now, if we use the definitions for “atonement” and “propitiation” when they first entered Bible translation (*before theology started changing their meanings*), then it means “to make at one” and to “reconcile”.

And the adjective form has these meanings:

- **favorably inclined**
- **well-disposed**
- propitious

[Source.](#)

Again, we see the same idea from the oldest English dictionaries, where it means to increase favor with, often with the idea of reconciling.

Usage in the Septuagint (LXX)

The Septuagint is a very early translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek. **The Septuagint is usually abbreviated “LXX”** because “LXX” is the Roman numeral for 70, and “Septuagint” means “70”. The original LXX was completed long before Jesus was born, and the LXX was almost certainly the “Bible” of the early Greek-speaking church.

If you want more information on the LXX, please see my article: [The Bible: 66 books vs 73 and Why \(the “Apocrypha” Explained\)](#), since the LXX features prominently in the Catholic argument that the Bible should have more than 66 books. (*Details in the article.*)

Why do we care about the LXX?

Because we have very solid definitions for the Hebrew words that the LXX was translated from, so seeing how the “hilaskomai” word family was used to translate Hebrew words tells us something about what the Greek words mean.

We'll go through the four words in the word family one at a time, plus a bonus one, and then summarize them.

Verb form: “?????????” (*hilaskomai*).

As a reminder, here are the places where the verb form is used in the New Testament.

Luke 18:13 “But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, **be merciful (*hilaskomai*)** to me, the sinner!’

Hebrews 2:17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, **to make propitiation for (*hilaskomai*)** the sins of the people.

Below is every place that “hilaskomai” is used in the LXX highlighted in **red**, and the Hebrew word that the LXX translators thought “hilaskomai” would capture the meaning of in (*parenthesis*) after the word. Once we've looked at all of them, we'll go through the definitions of each one.

You can double check by cross referencing in the Apostolic Bible Polyglot on Biblehub.com. (*It's a bit janky to use though; search for the verse and then look for the “ABP” abbreviation in the last menu line, then click on that.*)

Deuteronomy 21:8 – ‘**Forgive (*kaphar*)** Your people Israel whom You have redeemed, O LORD, and do not place the guilt of innocent blood in the midst of Your people Israel.’ And the bloodguiltiness shall be forgiven them.

2 Kings 5:18 – “In this matter may the LORD **pardon (*salach*)** your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD **pardon (*Salach*)** your servant in this matter.”

2 Chronicles 6:30 – then hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and **forgive (*salach*)**, and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart You know for You alone know the hearts of the sons of men,

Psalm 25:11 – For Thy name’s sake, O LORD, **Pardon (salach)** my iniquity, for it is great.

Psalm 65:3 – Iniquities prevail against me; As for our transgressions, You **forgive (kaphar)** them.

Exodus 32:14 – So the LORD **relented (nacham)** from the harm which He said He would do to His people. (NKJV; NASB 95 has “changed His Mind”)

2 Kings 24:4 – and also for the innocent blood which he shed, for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; and the LORD would not **forgive (salach)**.

Lamentations 3:42 – We have transgressed and rebelled, You have not **pardoned (salach)**.

Psalm 79:9 – Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; And deliver us and **forgive (kaphar)** our sins for Your name’s sake.

Daniel 9:19 – “O Lord, hear! O Lord, **forgive! (salach)** O Lord, listen and take action! For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name.”

So far we have:

- Kaphar
- Salach
- [Nacham](#)

We covered “salach” at length in [the article on if God’s own character requires Him to punish sin](#), and we covered “kaphar” at (exhaustive) length in [my article on atonement](#) (because “kaphar” is the word we translate “atonement”). As a quick refresher, “kaphar” means “to ‘cover over’ a wrongdoing so that it’s overlooked in order to bring reconciliation” though the focus is usually on the reconciliation aspect; basically, it’s the normal Hebrew word for “reconcile”. The word “salach” is pretty much always translated as either forgiveness or pardon, and it means exactly that.

However, “nacham” (?????) in Exodus 32:14 is new, so we’ll look at it now before we move onto the other cognates.

“Nacham”

Here are the short definitions for the niphal form, which is the form in Exodus 32:14; and you can read the full lexical entry [here](#).

[???] verb Niph`al be sorry, console, oneself, etc.

1 be sorry, **moved to pity, have compassion, for others,**

2 be sorry, rue, suffer grief, **repent, of one's own doings**

3 comfort oneself, be comforted:

4 comfort oneself, ease oneself

Now, the “moved to pity” and “have compassion” aspects of definition #1 align very well with Luke 18:13, where the sinner says “*God, **be merciful (hilaskomai) to me, the sinner!***”. To see why definition #2 makes sense (*with the idea of changing your mind*), one need only look at the context: **Exodus 32:14 is right after the golden calf incident.** So God “changed His mind” (NASB 95) or “relented” (NKJV) of the judgement He had been planning to bring on Israel.

Given definition #1, it seems like he was “moved to pity” and to “have compassion” on Israel after Moses interceded for them:

Exodus 32:13-14 (*LSB, Moses is speaking*)

13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and You said to them, ‘I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your seed, and they shall inherit *it* forever.’”

14 So Yahweh **relented** concerning the harm which He said He would do to His people.

This makes sense because remember — to dramatically oversimplify — the “niph`al” stem is used here, and the Niph`al stem in Hebrew is used to indicate the passive voice (*among other things, but we'll skip the nuance because I'm sure you don't want a Hebrew lesson*), and in the passive, “?????????” (*hilaskomai*) means effectively the same thing. Remember Mounce's definition:

Gloss:

(mid.) to make atonement for, with a focus on the means for accomplishing forgiveness, resulting in reconciliation; **(pass.)** to have mercy on, be merciful to

So that makes perfect sense.

We'll save commentary on the rest until later.

Masculine noun: “?????????” (*hilasmos*).

Here are the places it's used in the New Testament:

1 John 2:2 and He Himself is the **propitiation (*hilasmos*)** for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the **propitiation (*hilasmos*)** for our sins.

And here are the places in the Old Testament where a Hebrew word is translated “hilasmos”, as well as the Hebrew word which was translated that way.

Daniel 9:9 – “To the Lord our God belong compassion and **forgiveness (*selichah*)**, for we have rebelled against Him;

Ezekiel 44:27 – “On the day that he goes into the sanctuary, into the inner court to minister in the sanctuary, he shall offer his **sin offering (*chatta’ah*)**,” declares the Lord GOD.

Psalms 130:4 – But there is **forgiveness (*selichah*)** with You, That You may be feared.

Leviticus 25:9 – ‘You shall then sound a ram’s horn abroad on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the day of **atonement (*kippur*)** you shall sound a horn all through your land.

Numbers 5:8 – But if the man has no relative to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution which is made for the wrong must go to the LORD for the priest, besides the ram of **atonement (*kippur*)**, by which atonement is made for him.

Amos 8:14 – “As for those who swear by the **guilt (*ashmah*)** of Samaria, Who say, ‘As your god lives, O Dan,’ And, ‘As the way of Beersheba lives,’ They will fall and not rise again.”

(Note: “guilt” in Amos 8:14 could also be translated “guilt offering”, like in Ezekiel 44:27 just above; we’ll look at that in a minute.)

The four words used are:

- [selichah](#)
- [kippur](#)
- [chatta’ah](#)
- [ashmah](#)

We’ll look at each in turn.

“Selichah”

“Selichah” is simply the noun form of “salach”, which we looked at deeply in [the article on PSA’s second pillar](#)

. “Salach” is the verb which means to forgive/pardon, and “selichah” is the noun form which means “a pardon/forgiveness”, which you can see from the definition of “selichah”

Definition: Forgiveness, Pardon

Meaning: pardon

Word Origin: Derived from the root ?????? (salach), which means “to forgive” or “to pardon.”

And from Brown-Driver-Briggs:

????????? noun feminine **forgiveness** (late; on formative see Köii. 1, 197); — ?? Psalm 130:4; plural abstract intensive **abundant forgiveness**, ?????????? Nehemiah 9:17, ?????????? Daniel 9:9.

Thus, there’s no need to look any further because we covered the verb form in some detail previously. (*For those who didn’t read that article, “forgive/pardon” is exactly what it means.*)

“Kippur “

Similar to the above, “kippur” is the noun form of “kaphar”, which we looked at in the article on what “atonement” is. You might even recognize this word because of the phrase “Yom Kippur”, or the “Day of Atonement”. Most interestingly, Biblehub.com’s Strong’s entry was recently updated with additional information, which is quite useful here:

Definition: Atonement

Meaning: expiation

Word Origin: Derived from the root ?????? (kaphar), meaning “to cover,” “to atone,” or “**to make reconciliation.**”

Corresponding Greek / Hebrew Entries: – G2433 ?????????? (**hilaskomai**) – to be propitious, **to make reconciliation**

– G2643 ?????????? (katallag?) – reconciliation, restoration to favor

So again, we have a meaning of “to make reconciliation” for a word in the “hilaskomai” word family. We won’t spend more time on this Hebrew word because there’s a whole article on the verb form, “kaphar”.

“chatta’ah”

While the previous two aren't very complicated, this one is very interesting. It's the word for "sin".

No joke.

Definition: Sin, sin offering

Meaning: an offence, its penalty, occasion, sacrifice, expiation, an offender

Word Origin: Derived from the root ?????? (chata), meaning "to miss" or "to sin."

Corresponding Greek / Hebrew Entries: – ???????? (hamartia) – Strong's Greek 266: Often used in the New Testament to denote sin, paralleling the Hebrew concept of "chatta'ah."

Usage: The term "chatta'ah" primarily refers to sin, encompassing both the act of sinning and the condition of sinfulness. It is used to describe moral failings, transgressions against God's law, and the inherent sinful nature of humanity. Additionally, "chatta'ah" can refer to a sin offering, a sacrifice made to atone for sin and restore the relationship between the sinner and God.

So "chatta'ah" means "sin", but most interestingly, it can also refer to a "sin offering". The obvious connection with the "hilaskomai" word family is that the sin offering is a "means of reconciliation". Again we have the idea of reconciliation, but this appears to state the specific means of reconciliation: a sin offering.

This is great data!

Both uses of "hilasmos" in the New Testament state that Jesus is "the propitiation (hilasmos) for our sins". So with what we just learned, you could understand those verses in two ways:

- Jesus is the "means of reconciliation" for our sins.
- Jesus is the "sin offering" for our sins.

Keep that in mind while we look at the next word.

"Ashmah"

Here's the lexical entry:

Definition: Guilt, offense, sin, wrongdoing

Meaning: guiltiness, a fault, the presentation of a, sin-offering

Word Origin: Derived from the root ?????? (asham), which means to be guilty or to offend.

Corresponding Greek / Hebrew Entries: – G266 (???????, hamartia) – sin

– G3900 (?????????, paraptoma) – trespass, offense

Usage: The Hebrew word “ashmah” primarily denotes a state of guilt or the condition of having committed an offense. It is often used in the context of moral or legal transgressions against God’s laws. The term can refer to both the act of sinning and the resultant state of guilt that follows. **In the Old Testament, “ashmah” is frequently associated with the need for atonement and the offering of sacrifices to restore one’s relationship with God.**

Notice that “ashmah” is also used of offerings, and the definition specifically includes “sin offering”, just like the previous Hebrew word we looked at. However, looking at the verse where it’s used, “sin offering” doesn’t make great sense. Some sense, yes, but it’s not clear like with the verse that the previous Hebrew word was used in.

Amos 8:14 – “As for those who swear by the **guilt (ashmah)** of Samaria, Who say, ‘As your god lives, O Dan,’ And, ‘As the way of Beersheba lives,’ They will fall and not rise again.”

Translating it as “*those who swear by the sin offering of Samaria*” doesn’t make great sense. Some, but not a lot. If we understand “hilasmos” as “reconciliation” it would read “*those who swear by the reconciliation of Samaria*”; that doesn’t make sense because Samaria never reconciled to God. As the capital of Israel (*contrasted with Judah after the nation split*), they only had wicked kings and didn’t turn back to God.

Now, there’s some debate as to if it’s “ashmah” or “Ashimah”, the latter apparently being a pagan god. The NET Bible has a footnote to this effect:

tn Heb “the sin [or “guilt”] of Samaria.” This could be a derogatory reference to an idol-goddess popular in the northern kingdom, perhaps Asherah (cf. 2 Chr 24:18, where this worship is labeled “their guilt”), or to the golden calf at the national sanctuary in Bethel (Hos 8:6; 10:8). Some English versions (e.g., NEB, NRSV, CEV) reprint the word and read “Ashimah,” the name of a goddess worshiped in Hamath in Syria (see 2 Kgs 17:30).

So as far as “hilasmos” goes, I’m not sure how to apply this verse to its definition. **I see a slight inclination toward “sin offering” because the word can mean that, and it’s the only point of overlap I see between “ashmah” and “hilasmos”.** Other than that, I’m not sure we can learn more from this one.

Next, we’ll move on to the next word in the “hilaskomai” word family.

Neuter Noun: “????????????” (*hilastérion*)

Here are the two places it’s used in the New Testament:

Romans 3:25 whom God displayed publicly as a **propitiation (*hilastérion*)** in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;

Hebrews 9:5 and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the **mercy seat (*hilastérion*)**; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

Here are all the places where a Hebrew word is translated as “hilastérion” in the LXX. You’ll notice a theme very quickly...

Exodus 25:17-22

17 “You shall make a **mercy seat (*kapporeth*)** of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. **18**“You shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the **mercy seat (*kapporeth*)**. **19**“Make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim *of one piece* with the **mercy seat (*kapporeth*)** at its two ends. **20**“The cherubim shall have *their* wings spread upward, covering the **mercy seat (*kapporeth*)** with their wings and facing one another; the faces of the cherubim are to be *turned* toward the **mercy seat (*kapporeth*)**. **21**“You shall put the **mercy seat (*kapporeth*)** on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you. **22**“There I will meet with you; and from above the **mercy seat (*kapporeth*)**, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel.

Exodus 31:7 – the tent of meeting, and the ark of testimony, and the **mercy seat (*kapporeth*)** upon it, and all the furniture of the tent,

Exodus 35:12 – the ark and its poles, the **mercy seat (*kapporeth*)**, and the curtain of the screen;

Exodus 37:5-9 – **5** He put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry it. **6** He made a **mercy seat (*kapporeth*)** of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. **7**He made two cherubim of gold; he made them of hammered work at the two ends of the **mercy seat (*kapporeth*)**; **8** one cherub at the one end and one cherub at the other end; he made the cherubim *of one piece* with the **mercy seat (*kapporeth*)** at the two ends. **9** The cherubim had *their* wings spread upward, covering the **mercy seat (*kapporeth*)** with their wings, with their faces toward each other; the faces of the cherubim were toward the **mercy seat (*kapporeth*)**.

Numbers 7:89 – Now when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the **mercy seat (kapporeth)** that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim, so He spoke to him.

Leviticus 16:2 – “Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil, before the **mercy seat (kapporeth)** which is on the ark, or he will die; for I will appear in the cloud over the **mercy seat (kapporeth)**.”

Leviticus 16:13-15 – **13** “He shall put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of incense may cover the **mercy seat (kapporeth)** that is on *the ark of the testimony*, otherwise he will die. **14** “Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle *it* with his finger on the **mercy seat (kapporeth)** on the *east side*; also in front of the **mercy seat (kapporeth)** he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times. **15** “Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the **mercy seat (kapporeth)** and in front of the **mercy seat (kapporeth)**.”

Ezekiel 43:14 – “From the base on the ground to the lower **ledge (azarah)** shall be two cubits and the width one cubit; and from the smaller **ledge (azarah)** to the larger **ledge (azarah)** shall be four cubits and the width one cubit.

Ezekiel 43:17 – And the **ledge (azarah)** shall be fourteen cubits long by fourteen wide in its four sides, the border around it shall be half a cubit, and its base shall be a cubit all around; and its steps shall face east.”

Ezekiel 43:20 – And you shall take some of its blood and put it on its four horns and on the four corners of the **ledge (kapporeth)**, and on the border all around; so you shall cleanse it and make atonement for it.

Amos 9:1 – I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and He said, “Smite the **capitals (kaphtor)** so that the thresholds will shake, And break them on the heads of them all! Then I will slay the rest of them with the sword; They will not have a fugitive who will flee, Or a refugee who will escape.

We'll look at each word in turn

- [Kapporeth](#)
- [Azarah](#)
- [Kaphtor](#)

“Kapporeth”

There’s not a lot to say here because it should be obvious, but for completeness...

Definition: Mercy Seat

Meaning: a lid

Word Origin: Derived from the root ?????? (kaphar), meaning “to cover” or “to atone.”

Corresponding Greek / Hebrew Entries: – G2435 (hilast?rion): Often translated as “propitiation” or “mercy seat” in the New Testament, notably in Romans 3:25, where Christ is described as a propitiation through faith in His blood.

Usage: The term “kapporeth” refers to the “mercy seat,” which is the gold lid placed on the Ark of the Covenant. It is considered the place where God would appear and communicate with Moses, and it is central to the Day of Atonement rituals. The mercy seat symbolizes God’s throne and His presence among His people, as well as His provision for atonement and reconciliation.

It’s essentially only used of the “lid” of the ark. You can see in the Ezekiel passages that it’s translated “ledge”, but rather a lot of people think that’s referring to the lid of the Ark as well. See the next word/section.

“azarah”

If you read Ezekiel 43 — where the word is used — you’ll see that in context, it’s talking about the altar and offerings burned on it. I’m not sure why “hilast?rion” was chosen.

??????? noun feminine apparently enclosure; — absolute ??:

1 ledge surrounding Ezekiel’s altar; ???? ?????????????????? = ?????????????? ???? Ezekiel 43:14, below ?????????????? ???? Ezekiel 43:14; ???? alone Ezekiel 43:17; Ezekiel 43:20; Ezekiel 45:19 (see Commentaries).

2 outer court of temple, ?????????????? ??????2Chronicles 4:9; with doors 2 Chronicles 4:9; 2Chronicles 6:13 (see 1 ??????)

3. b, and on ?? in Herod’s temple NowArchaeology ii. 78 f f.).

Since there are so few uses and since it clearly refers to the altar, I’m not sure there’s much we can learn from this one.

“Kaphtor”

This one might seem a bit odd, but with a little looking it makes sense.

Definition: Capital, **Knob, Bulb**

Meaning: a chaplet, the capital of a, column, a wreath-like button, **disk on the candelabrum**

Word Origin: Of uncertain derivation

Corresponding Greek / Hebrew Entries: There is no direct Greek equivalent for “kaphtor” in the Strong’s Greek Dictionary, as it is a specific Hebrew term related to the design of the menorah.

Usage: The term “kaphtor” is used in the Hebrew Bible to describe ornamental features, specifically the decorative knobs or bulbs found on the lampstand (menorah) in the Tabernacle. It signifies a rounded, bulbous shape that is part of the intricate design of sacred objects.

And looking at where it’s used, the ornamental definition does make sense.

Amos 9:1 – I saw the Lord standing **beside the altar, and He said, “Smite the capitals (kaphtor) so that the thresholds will shake, And break them on the heads of them all!** Then I will slay the rest of them with the sword; They will not have a fugitive who will flee, Or a refugee who will escape. Double check this one.

If you understand “kaphtor” to mean the ornamental bulbs on the menorah, it makes sense. It’s not translated that way, but it makes sense. The connection with “hilastérion” seems to be that they were on top of the menorah.

Adjective form: “?????” (*hileós*)

Ironically, the word form that’s the least helpful is also the one we have the most information on. Here again are the two New Testament verses where it’s used:

Matthew 16:22 Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “**God forbid (*hileós*)** it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.”

Hebrews 8:12 “FOR I WILL BE **MERCIFUL (*hileós*)** TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE.”

Now, did you notice that Hebrews 8:12 is in CAPS? That’s because the NASB 95 puts verses in caps

when it's a quotation of the Old Testament.

That's extremely useful!

Why?

Because it means that we have a Holy Spirit-inspired translation of a Holy Spirit-inspired word. Unfortunately, it's the least useful word since there isn't much controversy surrounding it. However, we can still learn something from it. Here's the verse that Hebrews 8:12 is quoting:

Jeremiah 31:34

"They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for **I will forgive (salach) their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.**"

So according to the Holy Spirit "forgive" is a good understanding of the adjective form "hileós". (*Technically/literally "I will be forgiving"*)

Again, that's good to know.

As a slight spoiler, the word "hileós" is most often used to translate the same word "salach", usually with a verb such as "will be", making the understanding more literally "will be forgiving", or "will be compassionate", etc. However, it's also used how Peter used it in Matthew, as an idiomatic way to say "God forbid this" in the sense of appealing to God's mercy.

With that in mind, we'll look at how it's used now:

2 Samuel 20:20 – Joab replied, "**Far be it (chalilah), far be it (chalilah)** from me that I should swallow up or destroy!

2 Samuel 23:17 – and he said, "**Be it far (chalilah)** from me, O LORD, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?" Therefore he would not drink it. These things the three mighty men did.

1 Chronicles 11:19 – and he said, "**Be it far (chalilah)** from me before my God that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of these men who went at the risk of their lives? For at the risk of their lives they brought it." Therefore he would not drink it. These things the three mighty men did.

Isaiah 54:10 – "For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, But My lovingkindness will not be removed from you, And My covenant of peace will not be shaken," Says the LORD who **has compassion (racham)** on you.

Genesis 43:23 – But he said, "**Peace (shalom)** be to you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; your money was in my

possession.” Then he brought Simeon out to them.

Exodus 32:12 – “Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, ‘With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth ‘? Turn from Your burning anger and **change Your mind (nacham)** about doing harm to Your people.

Numbers 14:19-20 – **19** “**Pardon (salach)**, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.” **20** So the LORD said, “I have **pardoned (salach)** *them* according to your word;

Deuteronomy 21:8 – ‘**Forgive (kaphar)** Your people Israel whom You have redeemed, O LORD, and do not place the guilt of innocent blood in the midst of Your people Israel.’ And the bloodguiltiness shall be forgiven them.

2 Chronicles 6:21 – “Listen to the supplications of Your servant and of Your people Israel when they pray toward this place; hear from Your dwelling place, from heaven; hear and **forgive (salach)**.

2 Chronicles 6:25 – then hear from heaven and **forgive (salach)** the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You have given to them and to their fathers.

2 Chronicles 6:27 – then hear in heaven and **forgive (salach)** the sin of Your servants and Your people Israel, indeed, teach them the good way in which they should walk. And send rain on Your land which You have given to Your people for an inheritance.

2 Chronicles 6:39 – then hear from heaven, from Your dwelling place, their prayer and supplications, and maintain their cause and **forgive (salach)** Your people who have sinned against You.

2 Chronicles 7:14 – and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will **forgive (salach)** their sin and will heal their land.

Jeremiah 5:1 – “Roam to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, And look now and take note. And seek in her open squares, If you can find a man, If there is one who does justice, who seeks truth, Then I will **pardon (salach)** her.

Jeremiah 5:7 – “Why should I **pardon (salach)** you? Your sons have forsaken Me And sworn by those who are not gods. When I had fed them to the full, They committed adultery And trooped to the harlot’s house.

Jeremiah 31:34 – “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will **forgive (salach)** their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

Jeremiah 36:3 – “Perhaps the house of Judah will hear all the calamity which I plan to

bring on them, in order that every man will turn from his evil way; then I will **forgive (salach)** their iniquity and their sin.”

Jeremiah 50:20 – ‘In those days and at that time,’ declares the LORD, ‘search will be made for the iniquity of Israel, but there will be none; and for the sins of Judah, but they will not be found; for I will **pardon (salach)** those whom I leave as a remnant.’

Amos 7:2 – And it came about, when it had finished eating the vegetation of the land, that I said, “Lord GOD, please **pardon! (salach)** How can Jacob stand, For he is small?”

1 Kings 8:30 – “Listen to the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place; hear in heaven Your dwelling place; hear and **forgive (salach)**.

1 Kings 8:34 – then hear in heaven, and **forgive (salach)** the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You gave to their fathers.

1 Kings 8:36 – then hear in heaven and **forgive (salach)** the sin of Your servants and of Your people Israel, indeed, teach them the good way in which they should walk. And send rain on Your land, which You have given Your people for an inheritance.

1 Kings 8:39 – then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and **forgive (salach)** and act and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart You know, for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men,

1 Kings 8:50 – and **forgive (salach)** Your people who have sinned against You and all their transgressions which they have transgressed against You, and make them objects of compassion before those who have taken them captive, that they may have compassion on them

Here are the four words it’s translated as, and we’ll look at each in turn:

- [chalilah](#)
- [racham](#)
- [shalom](#)
- nacham (*We looked at this word earlier, so we won’t look at it again since it’s used in the same context.*)

Now we’ll look at them in more detail.

“**chalilah**”

This is the Hebrew word that’s used when it has the same sense of Peter’s “God forbid” in Matthew 16.

????????? substantive with ? locative, **used as exclamation** literally ad profanum! **i.e. far be it** (for me, thee, etc.)

Okay, so that seems entirely simple. It doesn’t much bear on our topic, other than that the word has the connotation of “mercy”, or even perhaps “favor” in the sense of God favoring someone by not

allowing something bad.

“racham”

This is only used once, in Isaiah 54:10, where it’s translated “Says the LORD who **has compassion (racham)** on you.” That makes perfect sense with the definition:

Usage: The Hebrew verb “racham” primarily conveys the idea of **deep compassion and mercy**, often akin to the tender feelings a parent has for a child. It is used to describe **God’s merciful and compassionate nature towards His people**, as well as the expected behavior of individuals towards one another. The term implies a profound emotional response that leads to action, **often in the form of forgiveness** or aid.

Once again, we see the link to forgiveness. This word also has a connection to compassion and mercy as well, so it fits right in with the rest of the words in its word family.

“shalom”

This word probably needs no introduction because it’s the Hebrew word for “peace”.

??????? 237 noun masculine Isaiah 54:13 **completeness, soundness, welfare, peace**

It’s only used in Genesis 43:23: “Peace (shalom) be to you, do not be afraid.”. The aspect of being merciful doesn’t fit well, but being gracious/well-disposed does, which is part of the Greek word’s meaning.

And that’s it for the adjective form “hileós”.

We’ll now move on to a “bonus” version of the word that will be highly illuminating.

Bonus: emphatic verb form: “?????????????” (exhilaskomai)

We’ve looked at two noun forms, an adjective form, and a verb form; **now we’ll look at an additional verb form that will be crucial.**

This second verb form is a strengthened form. In English, we often add words to strengthen verbs. For example, “fast” can be strengthened in several ways: “super fast”, “very fast”, “extremely fast”, etc. Greek does the same thing, but the “strengthening” is usually added to the beginning of the word as a prefix instead of being a separate word.

Now, the strengthened form of the verb isn't used in the New Testament, but it's used pretty extensively in the Septuagint/Old Testament. This is important because of the way it's translated: **it's almost always used to translate "kaphar"**.

Now, since it's not used in the New Testament, many of the Greek tools I use to prove things aren't available. However, you can go to [this link](#) to confirm it. To see all the verses, you'll need to scroll down and hit the "fetch LXX verse(s)" button, located right under the "Occurrences in the LXX" heading.

If my count of that page is correct, exhilaskomai is used to translate "kaphar" in 89 places.

(As a point of intellectual honesty, I don't have the software to make a perfectly accurate count. The numbers above are based on semi-manual counting and thus are subject to my human error. However, I can't imagine the numbers are off by that much.)

Someone else said this:

When we consider exhilaskomai, the intensive form of this Greek verb (not used in the New Testament), the contrast is even more dramatic. **With nearly 90 occurrences in the Septuagint, this verb almost always has an active sense ("to make atonement").**

[Source](#).

So "nearly 90" matches my count of 89. Again, I might be off a little because my usual tools don't work on Koine Greek words that aren't used in the New Testament, but I don't think I'm far off.

As we covered at length and in exhaustive detail in [my article on the definition of "atonement"](#), "kaphar" means *"to (metaphorically) cover over a wrongdoing so it's 'overlooked' in order to bring reconciliation"*. What might not have come out in that article — though I hope it did — is that the ultimate goal of "kaphar" is reconciliation. The "covering over" of the wrong is done in order to bring reconciliation, and **thus "kaphar" is ultimately about reconciliation.**

Thus, it seems like the strengthened verb form "exhilaskomai" has a meaning that is primarily about reconciliation.

That's very significant.

I'm sure you noticed that by a *huge* margin, the most common translation of the "hilaskomai" word family are **(1)** "kaphar"/reconcile/reconciliation, and **(2)** forgive/pardon/forgiveness. This is very telling, and aligns perfectly with everything we've seen so far elsewhere.

LXX Conclusion

By a massive margin — when we include "exhilaskomai" — the Hebrew word most often translated into one of the "hilaskomai" word family is "kaphar" (*and its noun form*). It's not even close either. **Including "exhilaskomai", the "hilaskomai" word family is used to translate "kahpar" more than all other Hebrew words by a huge margin.**

That's a very strong endorsement of the meaning "reconciliation" being primary to the word family. (*This probably isn't surprising as we've been seeing this all along.*)

The second most common word that the "hilaskomai" word family is used to translate, beating out the rest by a wide margin is "salach" (*and its noun form*), which means "forgive/pardon". Both forgiveness/pardon and reconciliation have a very similar nuance of meaning.

As a third option, "sin offering" is a potential understanding of the specific word "hilasmos", which is the word used in 1 John 2 and 1 John 4. "Sin offering" connects because it is a "means of reconciliation", and the word family is about reconciliation. "Sin offering" as a definition is explicitly stated by both BDAG and Mounce.

The overwhelming vast majority of the time, the "hilaskomai" word family is used to translate "kaphar", which means "reconciliation". Second most common is "Selach", which means "forgiveness/pardon". Obviously there are other uses, but those two senses stand head and shoulders above the others in terms of usage.

Thus:

Since the early church would've used the LXX whenever they showed the scriptures to non-Jews, they would be used to seeing the "hilaskomai" word family being synonymous with reconciliation and forgiveness, not the appeasement of wrath.

That's important because they actually spoke the language. Based on everything we've seen so far, the word family — as used in the passages about Jesus and salvation — appears to be about reconciliation, and/or the means of reconciliation. There's also precedent for "sin offering" in 1 John. Of course, the word used in Romans appears to be about the "mercy seat" on the ark.

Now that we've looked at the LXX usage, we'll move on to the early church fathers.

The Early Church fathers

An important note before we begin looking at the quotes below: **in this case, we don't care about the theology, we only care about how they use the Greek words that we translate "propitiation."** That's it. I'll make a few observations about the theology if/when it's relevant, but that's not the primary thing we're looking for.

These are all the quotes I could find that touch clearly on the topic. I didn't include a bunch more because the word was only mentioned in passing, and thus didn't give any insight into the word's meaning. I also make no claim to have found all of the relevant quotes. I used a search engine of the early church fathers' writings to search for the verses that contain the words, and you can find that search engine [here](#). I have no idea how complete that search engine is, but I found enough quotes

from enough different early church fathers to establish how they used the word.

Here we go.

John Chrysostom: commentary on Romans

John Chrysostom lived from 347-407 AD and served as the Archbishop of Constantinople. Interestingly, “Chrysostom” isn’t his last name, but rather a epithet which means “golden-mouthed”, which he earned for his eloquence. He was one of the four most influential Greek-speaking early church fathers (*along with Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Athanasius of Alexandria*).

Here’s his commentary on Romans chapter 3, verses 24-25.

Ver. 24, 25. “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a **propitiation** through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness.”

See by how many proofs he makes good what was said. First, from the worthiness of the person, for it is not a man who doeth these things, that He should be too weak for it, but God all-powerful. For it is to God, he says, that the righteousness belongs. Again, from the Law and the Prophets. For you need not be afraid at hearing the “without the Law,” inasmuch as the Law itself approves this. Thirdly, from the sacrifices under the old dispensation. **For it was on this ground that he said, “In His blood,” to call to their minds those sheep and calves. For if the sacrifices of things without reason, he means, cleared from sin, much more would this blood. And he does not say barely ??????????, but ??????????????, entire redemption, to show that we should come no more into such slavery. And for this same reason he calls it a **propitiation**, to show that if the type had such force, much more would the reality display the same.** But to show again that it was no novel thing or recent, he says, “fore-ordained” (Auth. Version marg.); and by saying God “fore-ordained,” and showing that the good deed is the Father’s, he showeth it to be the Son’s also. For the Father “fore-ordained,” but Christ in His own blood wrought the whole aright.

[Source](#).

So here, John Chrysostom connects “propitiation” with “entire redemption”, and connects “redemption” with the sacrifices. As we covered in exhaustive (*and exhausting*) detail in the previous article, there’s nothing in the Old Testament sin offerings that points to PSA. In fact, we saw that the Old Testament sacrifices were about “kaphar” and “Salach”, the Hebrew words that mean reconcile/atonement and forgiveness/pardon respectively. We also saw in the previous article that the “Day of Atonement” (*at-one-ment/reconciliation*) was about cleansing from sin, which John Chrysostom states when he says “cleared from sin”.

Now, PSA advocates might object that the mention of “redemption” is a PSA term, but we’ll look at that deeply in another article, and so ignore it for now.

Theodoret: commentary on Romans

25. Whom God hath set forth to be a **propitiatory**, through faith in His blood. **The propitiatory was a golden plate, which lay over the ark**, having at either end the figure of a cherub, (Exod. xxv.) **and from thence the mercy of God was manifested to the high priest in his ministrations**. The holy apostle here then teaches, that the Lord Christ was the true **propitiatory**, for that ancient one was but a type of this. This name, however, is applied to Him as man, and not as God; for as God He Himself speaks from the **propitiatory**; while as man He receives this appellation even as others, such as “sheep” and “lamb,” and [236 “sin” and “curse,” and the like. (See John i. 29, 36. Acts viii. 32. 2 Cor. v. 21. Gal. iii. 13.) And the ancient **propitiatory** was bloodless in itself, inasmuch as it was also inanimate, and received only the sprinklings of the blood of the victims; but the Lord is God, and **propitiatory**, and high priest, and lamb, and in His own blood hath worked out our salvation, demanding faith only from us.

[Source.](#)

Again we see that in Romans 3:25, the referent is the lid of the Ark, which today we call the “mercy seat”. Once again, we see the connection to the Old Testament Day of Atonement.

Augustine: Expositions on the Book of Psalms. Psalm XXXIV

25. But because there are many kinds of sinners, and not to be a sinner is difficult, or perhaps in this life impossible, he added immediately, of what kind of sinners the death is worst. “And they that hate the righteous one” (saith he) “shall perish.” What righteous one, but “Him that justifieth the ungodly”?739 Whom, but our Lord Jesus Christ, who is also “the **propitiation for our sins**”?740 **Who then hate Him, have the worst death; because they die in their sins, who are not through Him reconciled to our God. “For the Lord redeemeth the souls of His servants.”** But according to the soul is death to be understood either the worst or best, not according to bodily either dishonour, or honours which men see. “And none of them which trust in Him shall perish” (ver. 22); this is the manner of human righteousness, that mortal life, however advanced, because without sin it cannot be, in this perisheth not, while it trusteth in Him, in whom is remission of sins. Amen.

[Source.](#)

Again, reconciliation and redemption seem to be in view here.

Origen: Commentary on the Gospel of John. Book I.

Christ as Paraclete, as Propitiation, and as the Power of God.

But none of the names we have mentioned expresses His representation of us with the Father, as He pleads for human nature, and makes **atonement** for it; the Paraclete, and the **propitiation**, and the **atonement**. He has the name Paraclete in the Epistle of John:4629 “If any man sin, we have a Paraclete with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” And He is said in the same epistle to be the **atonement**4630 for our sins. **Similarly**, in the Epistle to the Romans, He is called a **propitiation**:4631 “Whom God set forth to be a **propitiation through faith**.” Of this proportion there was a type in the inmost part of the temple, the Holy of Holies, namely, the golden mercy-seat placed upon the two cherubim. But how could He ever be the Paraclete, and **the atonement, and the propitiation** without the power of God, which makes an end of our weakness, flows over the souls of believers, and is administered by Jesus, who indeed is prior to it and Himself the power of God, who enables a man to say:4632 “I can do all things through Jesus Christ who strengtheneth me.” Whence we know that Simon Magus, who gave himself the title of “The power of God, which is called great,” was consigned to perdition and destruction, he and his money with him. We, on the contrary, who confess Christ as the true power of God, believe that we share with Him, inasmuch as He is that power, all things in which any energy resides.

4629 1 John ii. 1, 2.

4630 ????????

4631 ????????????, Rom. iii. 25.

4632 Philipp. iv. 13.

[Source.](#)

Here, “propitiation” is connected with “atonement”, which we already looked at and it effectively means “reconciliation”. The word “atonement” that’s *not* highlighted in red — as you can see from the footnote — is “hilasmos”, the word used in 1 John 2 and 1 John 4. Again, “propitiation” appears to mean reconciliation and/or atonement, and “atonement” means reconciliation, so again, we’re back to reconciliation.

Based on an admittedly limited sample, it seems like the understanding of “propitiation” among the early church fathers was connected to either (1) the lid of the ark or (2) with reconciliation.

None of the other quotes I found that used it in passing contradict this either, and it seems consistent with everything else we’ve seen. Thus, it seems to be a solid working understanding of the word.

Conclusion

The definition of the English word “propitiation” *in modern times* depends on whether you’re using Christian theological sources or basically any other source. Theological dictionaries say it means “*to appease God’s wrath*”, while Merriam-Webster “*the act of **gaining or regaining the favor or goodwill of someone or something***”. Ancient usage clearly tilts in favor of the non-Christian, non-theological definition since it originally meant: “To induce to favour” and “to conciliate” (reconcile).

The lexical definitions for the Greek words show a clear connection to four things: **(1) reconciliation**, **(2) a means of forgiveness**, **(3) the lid of the ark** (*the place of reconciliation*) **(4)** a somewhat rare usage, but there’s a connection to **sin offerings**, which is mentioned in two of the best lexicons. The adjective form especially contains the idea of **mercy**.

Older English translations translate it variously as: **reconciliation**, **atonement** (“*at-one-ment, meaning reconciliation*”), “**make agreement**”, **mercy seat** (*the lid of the ark*), and **favor**.

The words used to translate it into latin have definitions of: **propitiate**, **render favorable**, **win over**, to **sooth (feelings)**. The noun forms are: **atonement**, **propitiation**, **appeasement**. And the adjective form means: **favorably inclined**, **well-disposed**, **propitious**. Again, there’s a lot of overlap, especially with “gaining or regaining favor”, just like the (*non-theological*) definition of propitiation through the centuries.

In the Septuagint, the word family is overwhelmingly used to translate 3 things: **(1)** the **lid of the ark** (*mercy seat*) **(2)** The Hebrew word that means **forgive/forgiveness**, **(3)** The Hebrew word that means **atonement/reconciliation** (*kaphar*), and this is the most common word it translates *by far*. Notably, it was also used for **sin offerings** in less common cases.

The early church fathers used it to mean **the lid of the ark**, and also as a synonym for **reconciliation**.

Given all of that, here is how I would personally translate those words, based on the research above:

Verb form: “?????????” ([*hilaskomai*](#)).

Luke 18:13 “But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, **have mercy on (*hilaskomai*)** me, the sinner!’

Hebrews 2:17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, in order **to bring reconciliation (*hilaskomai*) because of** the sins of the people.

(*Note: I’m not especially happy with the translation of Hebrews 2:17, but I can’t currently think of one better. Please note that the phrase “because of” is italicized to indicate a translator addition for clarity.*)

Masculine noun: “????????” ([hilasmos](#)).

1 John 2:2 and He Himself is the **sin offering** (*hilasmos*) for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the **sin offering** (*hilasmos*) for our sins.

(Note: you could also translate it “means of reconciliation, but “sin offering” seems to fit the context of these verses perfectly.)

Neuter Noun: “?????????” ([hilastérion](#)).

Romans 3:25 whom God displayed publicly as a **mercy seat** (*hilastérion*) in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; (*“mercy seat” here seems important to keep the continuity with the Old Testament usage, and it has strong support from Hebrews 9:5. However, you could also translate it “means of reconciliation”.*)

Hebrews 9:5 and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing **the mercy seat** (*hilastérion*); but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

Adjective form: “?????” ([hileós](#))

Matthew 16:22 Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “**God be merciful** (*hileós*), Lord! This shall never happen to You.”

Hebrews 8:12 “FOR I WILL BE **MERCIFUL** (*hileós*) TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE.”

I was planning to make the next article about “ransom” and “redemption” and what those mean. However, we need to examine the concept of death first, which will be the topic of the next article. More specifically, we’ll look at if death is a punishment from God, a natural consequence of sin, or something else.

After that, we’ll likely explore the concepts of “redemption” and “ransom” to see if they point to PSA. Just collecting the various verses on the topic has resulted in a significant shift in my perspective because the Bible discusses the underlying concepts quite frequently, I just hadn’t noticed it before.

I’ll see you in the next article. ?