

The Apostle John wrote: “If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous; and he is the *Propitiation* for our sins” (1 John 2:1-2).

What in the world does the Ark of the Covenant have to do with the word Propitiation?



I went back to the 1549 Book of Common Prayer (BCP) and this scripture from 1 John 2:1-2 was not there. I found this interesting, so I looked at the 1662 and 1771 BCPs—also missing. It seems that the scripture first appeared in the 1928 BCP. I think it was brilliant for the framers of the 1928 BCP to include this scripture.

To understand *propitiation*, we need to go back in time—1,400 years *before* Christ, or approximately 3,400 years ago—the time of Moses.

In the book of Exodus, the Israelites fled Egypt into the desert. From Mount Sinai, Moses received the Ten Commandments. They built a box or chest for holding the Ten Commandments and other sacred items. This chest became known as the Ark of Testimony or the Ark of the Covenant.

Then they built a large tent, with two interior rooms. The front room could be entered without fear. But the back room was called the Most Holy Place or the Holy of Holies (image following).



A three-inch curtain hung between the rooms. The curtain kept the presence of God “contained” in the room. In that room, you stood in the very presence of God. Only the High Priest could stand there, and then only one time per year—on Yom Kippur, after he had made the sacrifice for his sins. If he violated that rule, he died.

While the chest was called the Ark of the Covenant, the top of the chest—the lid with two angels, was called the Mercy Seat. Mercy Seat sounds like a chair, but it is not.

The Hebrew word, *Kapporeth*, is better translated as **Seat of Mercy**. Because it is not a chair, but a place, like Washington DC is the seat of American government. Sacramento is the seat of California government.



The lid on the box with the two angels is the Seat of Mercy or the Place of Mercy.

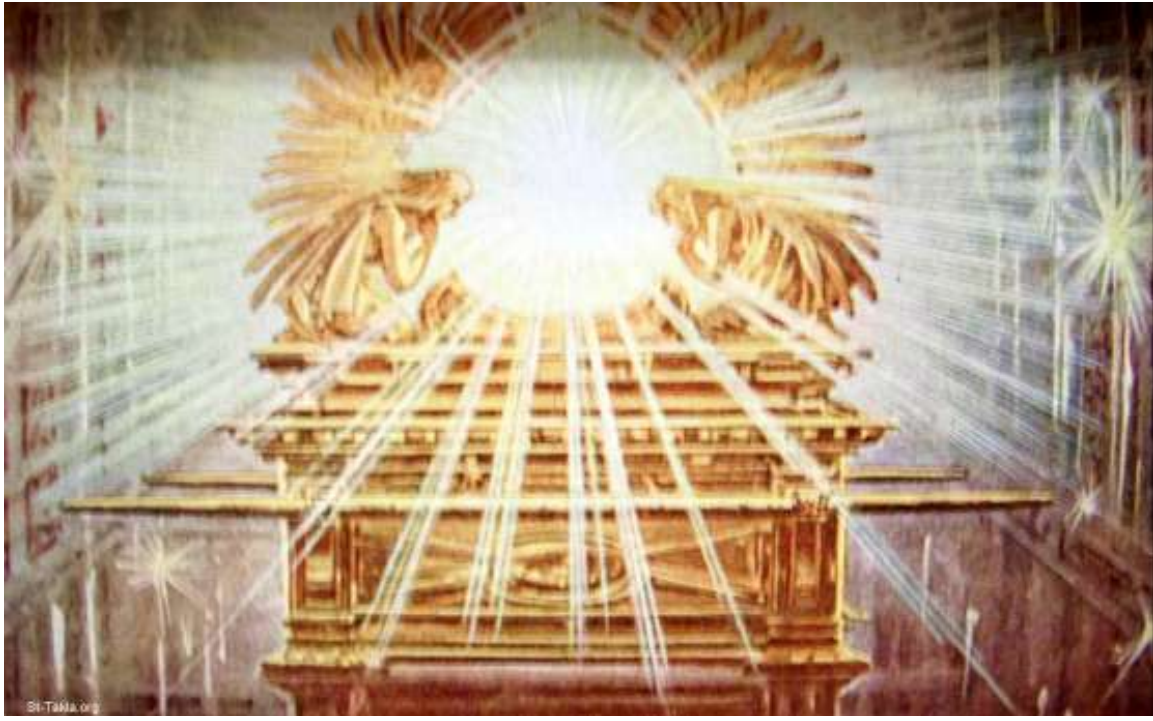
God spoke to Moses from the Seat of Mercy. In Exodus 25:20-22, God tells Moses, *And the cherubim shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the Mercy Seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another; toward the Mercy Seat shall the faces of the cherubim be. And thou shalt put the Mercy Seat above upon the ark; And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the Mercy Seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the Ark of the Testimony (The Ark of the Covenant), of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.*

Numbers 7:89, *Now when Moses went into the Tabernacle of Meeting to speak with God, he heard the voice of One speaking to him from above the Seat of Mercy that was on the Ark of the Testimony, from between the two cherubim; thus he spoke to him.*

The Lord reigns; let the nations tremble! He sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake (Psalm 99:1).

To atone means to make up for errors or deficiencies, as for an offense or crime: To atone for one's failings. So atonement is reparation or satisfaction for wrongs or sins.

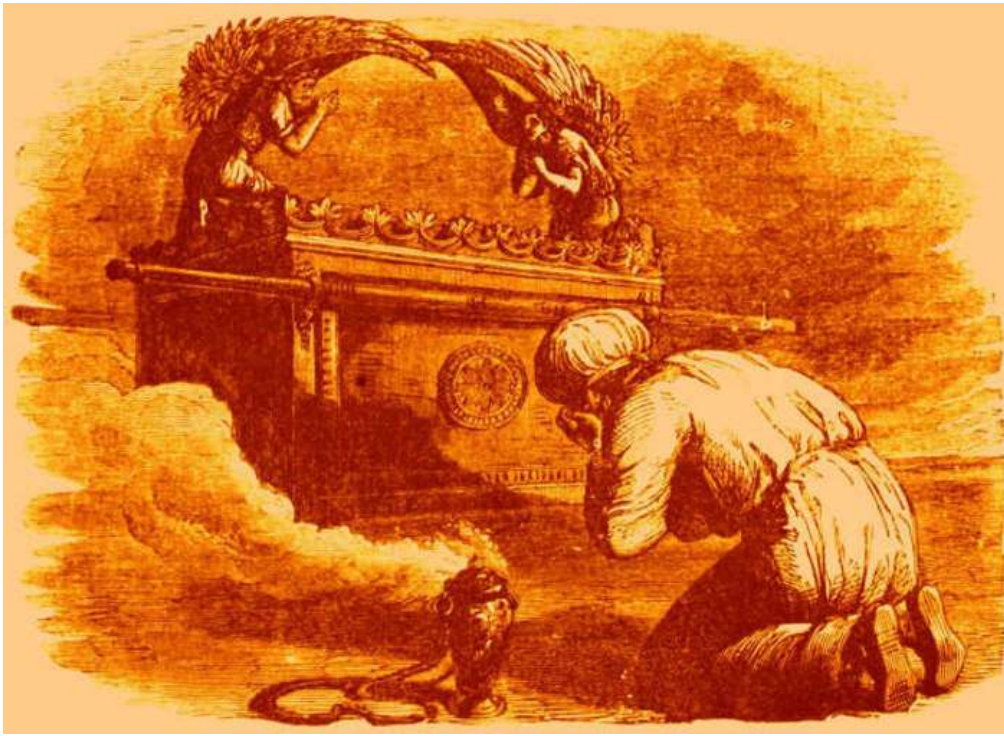
God instituted a special day called the Day of Atonement, or in the Hebrew—Yom Kippur. Leviticus 16 tells us that once per year, on Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement, the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, which he could only do one day each year, and he sprinkled the blood of the sacrificial lamb onto the Seat of Mercy for the sins of all Israelites.



PROPITIATION is Seat of Mercy or the Place of Mercy.

Therefore, Seat of Mercy cannot mean Sacrifice of Atonement, as translated by some bibles (New International Version—NIV, New Living Translation, Berean Study Bible, International Standard Version, NET Bible, God’s Word translation, Jubilee Bible 2000, Weymouth Bible Translation, World English Bible). The High Priest performed the Sacrifice of Atonement action (sprinkling the blood of the lamb) on the Seat of Mercy. The following translations get it right (English Standard Version, Berean Literal, New American Standard, King James, Holman Christian Standard, and others).

In a sense, the Seat of Mercy stood between God and people, behind the thick curtain. Jesus stands between God and people, and when he died, the curtain was torn in two, so we all have access to God, through Christ Jesus—access to the Seat of Mercy, Place of Mercy, the Person of Mercy.



Jesus is a type and shadow of the Great High Priest, offering one sacrifice—his life on the cross—for the sins of the whole world. It is his blood sprinkled on the Place of Mercy for our sakes. And yet, Jesus is a type and shadow of the Sacrifice itself, giving his life as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the whole world. Jesus is a type and shadow of the Seat of Mercy, where the sprinkled blood did the work of atonement, allowing him to be our Merciful Savior for all time. As John wrote, Jesus is the propitiation for our sins.

For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God (Heb 9:24, 10:12).

Something new happened. We used to have the Old Covenant, where the High Priest sprinkled blood for the sins of the people on the Day of Atonement. But in Matthew 26:28, Jesus announces that it all is about to change. *This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins* (Lk 22:20, Jn 6:53-56, Acts 20:28, 1 Cor 10:16).

Hebrews 4:14 and 16, *Therefore, since we have a Great High Priest, who has gone into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess...let us then approach the Throne of Grace with confidence, so that we may receive Mercy and find Grace to help us in our time of need.*

Jesus is our Propitiation, our Place of Mercy. Through Jesus we find mercy and grace, help, strength and comfort in this life, hope for the future, and life everlasting. By confessing Jesus as Lord and believing in his resurrection from the dead, we are saved (Romans 10:13).

...that all who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Propitiation = Place of Mercy = Jesus Christ

What a wonderful concept John embraced when he wrote this letter describing Jesus as the Seat of Mercy. Deep theology. Deep understanding. Deep love. Amen.