

continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. ² Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? ³ But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. ⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

EX: By the very nature of these sacrifices, offered time after time, multiple sacrifices offered each year, it was proved that they were not able to serve as the true and final offering. For that, they needed something greater.

HB 2.16-17 ~ *For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to ἱλάσκεσθαι (hil-ASS-kess-thy) for the sins of the people.* Here, the final version of this concept appears: translated, “make propitiation”.

EX: Again, the mind would flash back to similar uses of the phrase in the Septuagint. But one key passage would have been **DT 21.8** ~ ἱλάσκεσθαι (hil-ASS-kess-thy)—*Accept atonement, O Lord, for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, and do not set the guilt of innocent blood in the midst of your people Israel, so that their blood guilt be atoned for.*

The Jews took comfort knowing of the promised redemption and atonement offered them in the sacrifices of the temple. But, in Christ, we have **a holy sacrifice for our sins from His love** offered not just to the Jews, but **for all His creation!**

AP: I know my flaws—my failures—and my weaknesses better than anyone else. But the wonderful gift given through Christ is a sacrifice offered not just for those I would expect—but **for all His creation**. That includes the weak, the poor, the rich, the strong, the Jew, and the Greek!

RM 10.12-13 ~ *For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

CONCLUSION

I think about the thousands upon thousands who lived and died in ancient history—having fallen into false teachings and religions. Like us, so many of them felt the need for something to help appease a higher power—to restore their right relationship with their spirit, mother, or god. Some danced, some sacrificed, and some blew special whistles—all hoping to find a way to restore their broken relationship.

But in the New Testament, we see in three words a promise: a means by which we can have our reputation and relationship with Him, restored. In Him, we have a ἱλαστήριον (hil-ah-STAY-ree-ohn)—a new mercy seat upon which **a holy offering is made**. In Him, we have a ἱλασμός (hil-az-MOSS)—showing us that we have **our sins atoned from His love**. And in Him, we have a ἱλάσκεσθαι (hil-ASS-kess-thy): an atonement offered **for all creation**—through our “propitiation”!

2CR 5.18-19 ~ *All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*

INVITATION

QUESTION: What does it mean for Christ to be our “propitiation”?

TRN TO HB 9

INTRODUCTION

AZTEC/Religious Rituals/Aztec Death Whistle

The sound of the whistle is imminently disturbing: like the sound of an inhuman scream. Combined with the eerie story of its discovery, you find natural ingredients of pure “**nightmare fuel**”. It’s led to all sorts of fanciful stories about their abilities and use—some supernatural, and some just outright disturbing.

I’ve always found the religions of ancient societies to be fascinating. Whether these religions worshiped Baal, the Ashtoreth, or Mictlantecuhli, they point to a common desire in the human heart—for a supernatural presence, answer, and relationship with a power greater than ourselves.

AZTEC/Religious Rituals/Toxcatl

It’s barbaric and terrifying to us today. But it is but one of many false religions that mankind has created and fallen prey to over the centuries. Core to this religion and many other religions throughout human history is a simple idea: that there is a relationship that needs to be made correct between man and a power beyond his own. To the Aztec, this was accomplished through human sacrifice and the sound of a skull-shaped whistle. To the mind of the Greek-speaker at the time of the writing of the New Testament, it was spoken of using three different words with the same core meaning: ἱλαστήριον (hil-ah-STAY-ree-ohn), ἱλασμός (hil-az-MOSS), and ἱλάσκεσθαι (hil-ASS-kess-thy)—all translated in our modern Bibles as the same word: “**propitiation**”.

ILL—Scrabble (one of Erin’s favorites; don’t care for it; spell out words off other words—like a cross-word puzzle) One of the best things you can do is complete three new words with one play: a **triple word score**. In a way, that’s what we have here: three words that, together, tell a single message: one of great value, telling the story of how we can, at last, repair our relationship with the highest power—it’s found through ἱλαστήριον (hil-ah-STAY-ree-ohn), ἱλασμός (hil-az-MOSS), and ἱλάσκεσθαι (hil-ASS-kess-thy)—through our “**propitiation**”!

BD1: A Holy Sacrifice... (RM 3.21-25)

This word appears four times in most of our modern English translations of the New Testament: **RM 3.25**, **1JN 2.2**, **1JN 4.10**, and **HB 2.17**. I chose my wording well—because when you look at the Greek, the words translated as “**propitiation**” appear more frequently—especially when you look at the Greek Old Testament (ie: the Septuagint)!

In particular, ἱλαστήριον (hil-ah-STAY-ree-ohn) appears in **RM 3.25**, as we mentioned earlier (and we’ll come back to it again, later), and in **HB 9.2-5** ~ *For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. ³ Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, ⁴ having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a*

golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. ⁵ Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing **ἱλαστήριον** (hil-ah-STAY-ree-ohn). Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. Here, it's translated most as **"the mercy seat"**—a reference to the cover on top of the ark of the covenant.

The Septuagint uses the same word in **EX 25.17,21; 30.6** when referencing that same cover where, on the day of atonement, the high priest would take the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkle it on the **ἱλαστήριον** (hil-ah-STAY-ree-ohn)—*the mercy seat* (**LV 16.14-16**), providing a **holy sacrifice** for the people.

RM 3.21-25 ~ *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as ἱλαστήριον (hil-ah-STAY-ree-ohn) by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.*

EX: To the Jewish audience of his letter, Paul's wording would immediately bring to mind the words that they'd read in their synagogues and in the Temple service. Their mind would go to the High Priest, taking the blood of the sacrifice and placing it upon the **ἱλαστήριον** (hil-ah-STAY-ree-ohn)—*the mercy seat*. This **holy sacrifice** was one they'd see practiced each Day of Atonement—but which was, in truth, fulfilled in Christ.

AP: And it's a good thing, too, for *because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ He will render to each one according to his works: (RM 2.5-6)* As the Jews had needed atonement, so also do we. As they were storing up wrath, so are we! Countless animals and incenses were burned up on the altars over the generations—but even then, those sacrifices were made only for the Jewish people. But in Christ, we have a **holy sacrifice**!

IS 53.5 ~ *But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.*

BD2: ...For Our Sins... (1JN 2.1-3)

And that brings part way to the answer of an important question: **why? Why do we need ἱλαστήριον (hil-ah-STAY-ree-ohn)—a mercy seat? Why do we need propitiation?** The answer is simple: for our sins!

1JN 2.1-3 ~ *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the ἱλαστήριον (hil-az-MOSS) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. ³ And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.*

EX: By using the word **ἱλαστήριον** (hil-az-MOSS), John is pointing to a word very familiar to his audience—used alternatively in the Septuagint to refer to *"atonement"* (**LV 25.9; NM 5.8**) and *"forgiveness"* (**PS 129.4**). But most telling, it's also used in **EZ 44.27** ~ *And on the day that he goes into the Holy Place, into the*

inner court, to minister in the Holy Place, he shall offer his ἱλαστήριον (hil-az-MOSS), declares the Lord God. The word, here, is correctly translated as *"sin offering"*.

AP: And that, friends and Brethren, is the reason for **the holy sacrifice** we have in Christ—not to appease a capricious god or evil spirit—but as a *"sin offering"*—He was given as a **holy sacrifice for our sins**—and it's in Him, alone, that we have a chance at **ἱλαστήριον** (hil-az-MOSS)—in the perfect *"mercy seat"* offering of Christ!

1PT 2.24 ~ *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*

BD3: ...From His Love... (1JN 4.8-10)

But again, we can't help but ask: **why?** But this time, the question isn't why he made the **holy sacrifice**—that's clear—**our sins** required it. **But what was the motivation for it? Why would He even care to make the sacrifice? Was it out of a fickle fascination with the human creature? Was it born out of boredom or some other human-like flawed trait like we see with the pagan gods?** No, as we see in **1JN 4**, the reason was not from any such human interest, but rather, **from His love**.

1JN 4.8-10 ~ *Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

EX: Unlike the countless other false gods of the world—in John's time or our own—God is not some mere force of nature or some petty dictator. Rather, He offered His Son as a **holy sacrifice for our sins from His love**. And His love was not motivated by how great our love was for Him, but it is inwardly motivated from Him and His love, alone!

AP: And that's so good for us to hear, because all of us are flawed. All of us are buried under our failings. At some point, before coming to Christ, every person recognizes something about themselves: that they are filthy with sins—and that there's nothing that they can do to cleanse themselves of them. And when we realize that, it can initially cause us to feel hopeless. But then we look to Christ!

RM 5.6-11 ~ *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

BD4: ...For His Creation! (HB 2.16-17)

I can't help but think of all the blood shed—all the sacrifices made over the generations. And these sacrifices were important: but ultimately, they were just a shadow—a hint at something greater.

HB 10.1-4 ~ *For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are*