

Mercy Seat in the Christian Standard Bible

Some may wonder why the CSB renders the Greek word *hilasterion* in Rom 3:25 as “mercy seat,” instead of the previous rendering: “atoning sacrifice.” Others believe it is best rendered “propitiation.” As a committee we adopted “mercy seat” for a number of reasons, but we recognize that “propitiation” is also supported by many, and we list “propitiation” or “place of atonement” in a footnote. A few of the reasons for “mercy seat” are as follows.

- ① The translation “mercy seat” is not new; it has a long history, going back to Martin Luther and William Tyndale. We are not simply embracing a new theory but are adopting a translation that has been around for five hundred years. The Lexham English Bible has also adopted “mercy seat.”
- ② “Mercy seat” in Rom 3:25 represents what the Romans would know from the Greek translation of the OT (LXX). The first place they would go for *hilasterion* is its use in the OT, and there the term means “mercy seat” (Exod 25:17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 31:7; 35:12; 38:5, 7, 8; Lev 16:2, 13, 14, 15; Num 7:89).
- ③ The CSB also renders *hilasterion* as “mercy seat” in Heb 9:5, which adds to translational continuity.
- ④ “Mercy seat” is defended as well in recent scholarly work. Dan Bailey defended this reading in his dissertation written in 2000, and has updated his study in his appendix to Peter Stuhlmacher’s biblical theology. Recently, Stephen Hultgren wrote two articles in the *Journal of Theological Studies* defending the same translation.
- ⑤ Rendering *hilasterion* as “mercy seat” doesn’t remove the concept of sacrifice in the context of Rom 3:25 since the word “blood” shows that we have sacrificial motifs here. Further, the footnote referencing “propitiation” and “place of atonement” reiterate the notion of sacrifice. God’s wrath is appeased by the blood of his Son.
- ⑥ God’s mercy seat cannot be separated from the notion of God’s wrath being satisfied. Romans 1–3 confirms this conclusion, for human sin provokes the revelation of God’s wrath (1:18), and the righteous judgment of God involves his wrath (2:5; 3:5–6). The idea of propitiation isn’t absent because the mercy seat is the place where sins are wiped away and God’s wrath is appeased. Paul isn’t merely saying that the cross of Christ is where sins are forgiven in using the term mercy seat; he teaches us that this is the place God is propitiated and our sins are wiped away. Indeed, “mercy seat” arguably highlights the fuller biblical-theological thread of sacrifice and atonement than the alternative words.

This document has been prepared by Dr. Thomas Schreiner and the [CSB Translation Oversight Committee](#).