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ABSTRACT

REPRESENTING THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD: CHRIST
AS THE HILASTERION IN ROMANS 3:25

by

Valentin Zywietz

Advisor: John C. Peckham

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Thesis

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: REPRESENTING THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD: CHRIST AS THE
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Name of the researcher: Valentin Zywiets

Name and degree of faculty adviser: John C. Peckham, Ph.D.

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Problem

In Romans 3:25, Paul describes how the public display of Christ as the *hilasterion* demonstrates the righteousness of God. However, it is unclear what exactly Paul means by the term *hilasterion*, and how it is connected to the cover of the Ark of the Covenant for which it is usually used in the LXX.

Method

The first chapter of this paper consists of an exegetical investigation of Romans 3:25-26 paying consideration also to systematical implications for Paul's understanding of atonement and the character of God. The second chapter is an analysis of the meaning and

the function of the *ishthrion* in the LXX. In the third chapter, an attempt is made to fill the Old Testament content of *ishthrion* into Paul's argument about the demonstration of the righteousness of God.

Results

Paul probably viewed the *ishthrion* as a type of Christ, and this typological connection gives insight into the role of Christ until and in the antitypical Day of Atonement as understood by leading scholars within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Conclusion

Christ's role in the atonement may include the bearing of the judicial responsibilities that God voluntarily took upon himself when he granted pardon to sinners prior to the investigation at the Day of Atonement.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

REPRESENTING THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD: CHRIST
AS THE HILASTERION IN ROMANS 3:25

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Valentin Zywietz

June 2016

REPRESENTING THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD: CHRIST
AS THE HILASTERION IN ROMANS 3:25

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APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE

John C. Peckham, Ph.D., Adviser

P. Richard Choi, Ph.D.

Richard M. Davidson, Ph.D.

Date approved

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Romans 3:21-26 is generally recognized as a passage of great importance to the understanding of Paul's letter to the Romans, but it raises a number of rather complex questions on interpretation.¹ What is the "righteousness of God?" What does Paul want to indicate by his use of the word *i`lasthrion*, the Greek translation of *טַרְפוּקָה*, which literally refers to covering of the Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament? Romans 3:25 states that God demonstrated his righteousness by presenting Christ as the *i`lasthrion*, and one has to wonder what his motivation to do so was. Was his righteousness questioned? By whom, and why should God care? Each of these questions is not only interesting from a purely exegetical perspective, but has wider systematic implications that touch on our very understanding of atonement.

In speaking about atonement and how it is understood, one cannot but appreciate the work and the creativity in the different ways of describing the cross event in the so called "theories of atonement." It would be difficult to overstate the impact the discussions of these theories have had on Christianity over the centuries. Each of them attempts to

¹ Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 269. Ernst Käsemann, *An die Römer*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament, 8a (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1973), 85.

explain why, or whether, Christ had to die on the cross so that humans could find salvation from sin. Each of the theories of atonement contains a portion of truth that has been neglected by many theories. This portion however, is not incompatible with the true portions of all the other theories, and the truth it emphasizes cannot be logically maintained without considering and including all the others.² This thesis is an attempt to add one more truth to theories of atonement, without taking any away.

Given the breadth of the topic, one could easily argue that to explain atonement is the holy grail of theology, because in order to be complete, such an explanation would have to involve the nature of humans, the nature of sin, and the character and nature of God and the Trinity. Arguably none of the historical theories of salvation lives up to this high standard, and even though their creators demonstrably had a wider and more comprehensive understanding of atonement than a summarized reading of their work might suggest, their original task is not fulfilled yet.

This thesis will make an attempt to widen our understanding of the ministry of Christ in a way that is significant especially for my own faith community, the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Atonement in Scripture is never just about how we humans can find salvation, but also, and perhaps more importantly, how God can save us. In order to save a human being, two components are required: a divine action to provide salvation, and a human response to the provision of salvation. The two are intertwined, yet different. When the Israelite in the desert of the Sinai Peninsula brought his goat or lamb (Lev 4:28, 32) to

² Thomas J. Crawford, *The Doctrine of Holy Scripture Respecting the Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1954), 395–99.

be slaughtered so that his sin could be forgiven, his task was finished when he had slain his sacrifice in front of the altar. If atonement was just about us, why would we need any more information about what thereafter happened to the meat, and what happened within the sanctuary, a place that only very few Israelites ever even saw from the inside? If, then, Christ is the sacrifice, what do the rest of the rituals in Leviticus describe?

I believe it is plausible to argue that some events that need to take place in order for atonement to be complete happen in a place that is not directly observable by humans. If so, could this place be heaven, where God dwells and where Christ ministers as our high priest (Heb 9:12)? When Paul says that Christ has been publicly displayed as the mercy seat, might he thereby refer to an event, the veracity of which was observable on earth, but that really took place in heaven?³ This thesis paper will try and explore these questions and their implication for our understanding of the atonement.

Statement of Problem

Romans 3:25 says this about Jesus: “whom God displayed publicly as the mercy seat (*i`lasthrion*) in His blood through faith.” While most translations render *i`lasthrion* ‘propitiation,’ it is generally agreed upon that he is referencing the mercy seat in the OT sanctuary. However, this connection is usually not reflected in translations and has not had a significant influence on most prevailing interpretations of the passage.

³ Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 2.

Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the connection between Christ and the mercy seat in the context of atonement and thereby gain insights as to what aspects of Christ's ministry were reflected in the mercy seat and how that illuminates the meaning of Romans 3:25 relative to the broader understanding of atonement.

Methodology

In order to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion for this endeavor, three basic tasks need to be tackled: first is a thorough examination of the text in Rom 3:25-26 with a special focus on the means and the reasons for Christ's public display as the mercy seat; secondly, the OT material on the mercy seat, its ritual function, appearance, and pertinent ideas related to it need to be collected and categorized; thirdly the discoveries made in the first two steps need to be evaluated and compared from a systematic perspective.

This thesis is written with the working presupposition, that Scripture is not merely the product of human ingenuity, but has been inspired by God over the course of millennia. It is only when there is this unifying influence, that one can expect a unity in the writings of Paul and Moses on the role of Christ and on the function of a piece of furniture in the desert sanctuary. The grounding of this presupposition is not within the scope of this work, but it has been employed and explained by numerous authors.⁴ While this assumption is

⁴ For the groundwork of this presupposition I am indebted to Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994). This approach is generally similar to what John Peckham calls "final form canonical approach," John C. Peckham,

already present in my way of approaching Scripture, I would invite any reader to see for him/herself whether or not the available evidence from OT and NT can be used to form one unified system of thought on this matter. If this should happen to be the case, maybe this work, done under the assumption of unity, can nevertheless be an argument for this approach by showing order where chaos was to be expected.

In the examination of Rom 3:21-26, the focus will be on the passages that are connected to the public display of Christ as the *i`lasthrion*. Nevertheless, as the passage in question is a part of a larger argument, the context needs to be carefully considered. In order to be able to present the findings on the context as coherently and integrated as possible, I will move from the center of my argument to the outside, figuratively drawing a wider circle in each subchapter. Starting with the literal meaning of *i`lasthrion*, I will then move to the immediate context, namely the phrase “through faith in his blood” that has greatly complicated the translation and interpretation of this passage, especially in regard to the *i`lasthrion*. While *i`lasthrion* is often rendered ‘propitiation’ (NASB, NIV, KJV) or ‘sacrifice of atonement’ (NIV, NRS) in many translations, some older translators tried to reflect the Paul’s linguistic reference to the Old Testament ‘mercy seat’ (Tyndale New Testament (1534), Luther 1912, Elberfelder 1905). I will contend in this section that Paul’s reference to the mercy seat cannot only be coherently translated as such but actually enhances the explanative power of the passage.

The Love of God: A Canonical Model (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 46–67. See also: V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretations, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994). Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs, MI.: Andrews University Press, 2003).

From there, I will look at the term “Righteousness of God.” The meaning of this phrase is hotly debated, and there certainly is a range of possible meanings, but I expect it will be possible to suggest that it is most likely a nominalized attribute describing the character of God including his justice in judgment. In connection with my findings here, I will further examine the language that speaks about the idea of proving or demonstrating the righteousness of God in contrast to his longsuffering toward human sin as described in Rom 3:25-26. Finally, the passage will be put into the wider perspective of Rom 1-3. This last step cannot be as extensive as the matter would normally demand, but detailed enough to see that my interpretation of Rom 3:25-26 fits in with Paul’s general direction in his longest letter.

The focus of this first part will be on the question why God provides a demonstration of his righteousness, and what can be said from the text about the role of the *i`lasthrion* in this process.

The second major part of this thesis, chapter 3, will focus on the Old Testament use of *i`lasthrion* and its Hebrew counterpart $\tau r, POK;$. This examination can best be divided into three sections: section one will approach the terms from a literary and statistical angle. This chapter will note that $\tau r, POK;$ is always used to reference the covering of the Ark of the Covenant, the most sacred item in the desert Sanctuary and the Temple of Solomon. It is almost exclusively translated *i`lasthrion* in the LXX, and the exceptions will not really offer another possible background for Romans 3:25.

The second section of chapter 3 will treat the different functions the mercy seat had in the sanctuary services and the narratives of the Old Testament. The three described functions of the object in itself are its role in the Day of Atonement, a place of divine revelation where Moses was allowed to speak to the LORD and where the Shekinah rested, and its physical function of covering the ark. At least one other function can be derived from its cleansing in the Day of Atonement: that which needs cleansing must first accumulate impurities. Therefore the $\tau\text{r}, \text{P}\text{O}\text{K};$ likely functioned as a kind of storage or trap for the sins and impurities of the children of Israel during the year. All four of these aspects need to be factored in when looking at a possible connection between the mercy seat and Jesus in Rom 3:25.

The third and last section of the third chapter will look at what can be learned about the mercy seat from its outward appearance and physical features. The only prominent feature of the mercy seat are the two cherubim on it. Naturally, the symbolic meaning of cherubim needs to be traced through the Old Testament to establish a theory on the mercy seat. Two observations about the cherubim in the OT will be highlighted: they are ‘covering,’ and they are often seen directly below the throne of God.

In the fourth chapter, the results of the above described examinations will be brought together to form a theory on what it is in Christ’s ministry that Paul wanted to describe when he penned the words “whom God publicly displayed as $i\grave{\text{}}l\text{a}sthrion.$ ” The parallel between Christ and the mercy seat are threefold: (1) Christ, like the mercy seat, is the locus of God’s most direct revelation on earth, and as Christ was previously “hidden,” he is now, in the age of the gospel, made visible in the incarnation. (2) Christ

takes the sin of the world on himself during the time from the sacrifice until the cleansing of the sanctuary, and thus, like the mercy seat, is a depository of sin. (3) Christ, like the mercy seat, is a representation of God's divine government in that he takes upon himself the reproach connected to his acquittal of guilty humanity. In order to give some grounding to the second two aspects, I will provide an overview of central features in the sanctuary doctrine as laid out in Roy Gane's *Cult and Character*.⁵

Limitations

The scope of this thesis is potentially quite vast, if the background for all my examinations were to be given the same attention they have deservedly received from scholars in the past. Nevertheless, this thesis will give overviews of many discussions regarding the exegesis in Romans 3:25-26 as well as the Old Testament passages on the mercy seat. For this reason, I need to depend on the work of others on these matters. For Romans 3, there is a number of commentaries that I will consult, while the Old Testament foundations for the Adventist doctrine of the sanctuary, including Daniel 8:14, have been well explained by Adventist scholars like Roy Gane, Richard Davidson, Jacques B. Doukhan, and William H. Shea. It was my goal to include as many Old Testament passages as possible, as some details can only be found if the whole picture is considered at once. Thus, although my investigations in the Old Testament focus will be on Exodus 25 and Leviticus 16, I will take into consideration all the passages in which elements of the mercy seat and the ark are described. This includes Ezekiel's various descriptions of the cherubim

⁵ Roy E. Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

as well as the construction of Solomon's temple. Due to space limitations, I will try to keep my expositions of these passages short.⁶

⁶ In connection with the focus of this thesis it would be very interesting to explore the meaning of Rom 1:16-17, in which Paul calls the gospel a power in which the righteousness of God is revealed, but considering the extend of the debate, I would not be able to do it justice within the framework of this paper.

CHAPTER 2

CHRIST, THE I` `LASTHRION IN ROMANS 3:25

Introduction

Romans 3:21-26: “But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as mercy seat in through faithfulness, in his blood, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”¹

Romans 3:25 describes Jesus Christ as the one “whom God displayed publicly as i` `lasthrion in his blood, through faith.” The goal of this chapter is to show that this passage points to a meaningful and very relevant connection between God’s righteousness and the Old Testament sanctuary services. In particular, I aim to show that Paul understood Christ as filling the antitypical role of the mercy seat of the Old Testament and that this connection is related to the vindication of God in regard to sin, salvation, and justice.

The book of Romans places emphasis on the question of how humans can gain salvation, but the means of salvation that we humans have to hold onto must first be

¹ Translation by the author, based on the New American Standard Bible text.

provided by God. We do not save ourselves, but are being saved by God (Rom 5:8-10; 6:23; 9:16-18; Eph 2:8-9). Thus, to ask how we are saved, in last consequence, requires to ask how God saves us. The Old Testament sanctuary was instituted to show Israel not only their individual way of salvation, but also the way God deals with sin in a wider community and in regard to his own person and character. The discussion about how God can save is directly connected to the discussion about the necessity for the death of Christ. From the perspective of God and humankind, the New Testament reveals Christ as the means of salvation, and we can expect that the difficulties of salvation that led to such a drastic solution will become more obvious as well.

This first chapter will therefore also expound what Romans 3:25-26 has to say about Christ as the *i`lasthrion* in regard to this difficulty which lies in the apparent conflict between God's just character and his saving activity. I will begin with the term *i`lasthrion* and from there work my way through the text and into the context. One of the most important terms in the passage is the "Righteousness of God," or "His Righteousness." Two occurrences of the verbal and one of the adjective cognate of righteousness must also be taken into account.

The faith that appears in Romans 3:25 "through faith, in His blood" must be discussed in some detail, because it is directly connected to the *i`lasthrion* and God's activity of presenting Christ as such. This question is similar to the question about the objective vs. subjective faith of/in Christ in Romans 3:22 and other places, but as will be pointed out later, the two are different and need to be treated separately. Most phrases and words in Rom 3:25-26 will be explained proportionate to the extent that their precise

meaning is important in order to show that there is indeed an apparent conflict between the saving activity of God and his character in his justification of the sinner, which is addressed by the presentation of Christ as the *i`lasthrion*. We will now turn our attention to the exegesis of Rom 3:25-26, beginning with the term *i`lasthrion*.

I`lasthrion

The term *i`lasthrion* in Rom 3:25 has ignited a lot of debate in New Testament scholarship.² There are various interpretations of the meaning of *i`lasthrion*, as will be discussed below, but the inner biblical lexical evidence strongly points toward interpreting *i`lasthrion* as a reference to the covering of the Ark of the Covenant. In the LXX, the term is used 27 times in total and 21 of these occurrences clearly use it in that manner. In some other instances (Ezek 43:14, 17, 20) it is used to describe a part of the altar of burnt offerings. Amos 9:1 is unclear, but it appears to designate the capital of the pillars supporting the shrine in Bethel.³ How these come to be called *i`lasthrion* is difficult to account for, since we do not know much about the cultic procedures of the Bethel sanctuary. Beyond Romans 3:25, the only other occurrence in the NT is found in Hebrews 9:5 and denotes the covering of the ark. Given the evidence

² Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996). John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994); Norman H. Young, "The Impact of the Jewish Day of Atonement upon the Thought of the New Testament" (Dissertation, University of Manchester, 1973); R. C. H. Lenski, *Romans*, Commentary on the New Testament (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1936); Jewett, *Romans*; Charles H. Talbert, *Romans*, Smyth & Helwys Bible commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002).

³ Shalom M. Paul, *Amos: A Commentary on the Book of Amos* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 274–75.

from within scripture it is no surprise that many scholars have traditionally concluded that Paul is indeed presenting Christ as antitypical mercy seat.⁴ While studies on the extra-biblical use of the word are often of great value, I would consider the Greek translations of the Old Testament to be of greater importance in this case. The readers of Paul's letter considered the Old Testament to be their Bible, and most of them read it in Greek. I consider it likely that they either understood the reference, or would have sought for an explanation in scripture. While scripture was not always quoted verbatim from the LXX, it is still very likely that any attempt to understand Paul's use of *ἵλασθριον* in his letter to the Romans would have led them to the covering of the Ark of the Covenant.

The alternative to the interpreting *ἵλασθριον* as covering of the Ark of the Covenant basically consists in a nominalized verbal function, which is either denoted as propitiation,⁵ the appeasement of God's wrath, expiation, the clearance of sin, or the view that *ἵλασθριον* here designates a sacrifice of atonement. Proponents of these theories often recognize that Paul is making a reference to the mercy seat, but they interpret this reference in a more abstract way.⁶

The first two theories, propitiation and expiation, are based on the use of the cognate verb *ἵλασκωμαι*, which is often translated "forgive" in the LXX, but in extra-

⁴ Origen, Theodoret, Luther, Calvin, and Bengel supported this view, as found in Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 232. See also Talbert, *Romans*, 115. Jewett, *Romans*, 285. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 194.

⁵ Stott, *Romans*, 113.

⁶ Lenski, *Romans*, 255. Jewett, *Romans*, 285. Stott, *Romans*, 114. William M. Greathouse and George Lyons, *Romans 1-8: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2008), 126.

biblical use denotes the activity by which a pagan deity is appeased. Answering to theologians who believe that propitiation cannot be in view here, because God has no need to appease his anger, Cranfield argues that God’s wrath is not “capricious and fitful, unreasonable, or based on insulted pride, as is that of the heathen deities,” the wrath of God is present in the context of all instances of $\dot{\iota}\ddot{\iota}\lambda\alpha\sigma\kappa\omicron\mu\alpha\dot{\iota}$ in the LXX (LXX: Ex 32:14; De 21:8; 2 Ki 5:18; 25:4; Ps 24:11; 64:4; 77:38; 78:9; Lam 3:42; Dan 9:19).⁷ Propitiation normally is an act performed by the party that wants to find appeasement on the party that is to be appeased. In biblical usage however, God is the one that performs $\dot{\iota}\ddot{\iota}\lambda\alpha\sigma\kappa\omicron\mu\alpha\dot{\iota}$ and is the one whose wrath is appeased. This concept so widely differs from pagan models of appeasement, that it seems confusing to translate it in the same way, even if the action that God performs does end his wrath.⁸ In the LXX, $\dot{\iota}\ddot{\iota}\lambda\alpha\sigma\kappa\omicron\mu\alpha\dot{\iota}$ serves as a translation for different Hebrew words: רָפַק – cover, atone; סָלַח – pardon, forgive and, $\sim\text{סָנַח}$ – to change one’s mind. In this list, $\sim\text{סָנַח}$ only occurs once,⁹ so in most cases, the Hebrew text speaks about either forgiveness or atonement/coverage of sin or people. Because God performs $\dot{\iota}\ddot{\iota}\lambda\alpha\sigma\kappa\omicron\mu\alpha\dot{\iota}$, and because its object usually is either sin, or those who have sinned, it seems plausible to reject propitiation as a translation for $\dot{\iota}\ddot{\iota}\lambda\alpha\sigma\theta\rho\iota\omicron\mu\alpha\dot{\iota}$, unless it is given a new and adjusted meaning.¹⁰ Others consequently argue, based on the use of

⁷ Cranfield, C. E. B, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans: Vol. 1* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 215–16.

⁸ Lenski, *Romans*, 257.

⁹ In Exodus 32:14: “So the LORD changed his mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.”

¹⁰ So for example in Frederic Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Classic Commentary Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1956), 151. About one

i``laskomai a translation for ἵλασθαι, that *i``lasthrion* should be translated expiation as in the act or the means, by which atonement is made.¹¹

Another alternative, Paul is speaking about Christ as a sacrifice, is fairly popular with commentators.¹² The *i``lasthrion* is nowhere in scripture referred to as a sacrifice. The idea that Paul making a general allusion to a sacrifice in the context of the Day of Atonement seems very vague. While the *i``lasthrion* is prominent on the Day of Atonement, there is nothing in Leviticus 16 that would point to the idea that it is a sacrifice. If however one determines the meaning of *i``lasthrion* in this passage with an emphasis on the cognate verb, it makes sense to interpret it as that which propitiates, which, throughout the New Testament, is the death of Christ, which is often referred to as a sacrifice. Nevertheless, I will argue that there are no compelling reasons to go the detour via the verb to come to a satisfactory interpretation of this passage.

Frank J. Matera interprets the *i``lasthrion* as the Old Testament mercy seat as a general place for atonement. As the atonement took place on the mercy seat, so God has revealed the cross to be the place of atonement in the new covenant.¹³ The interpretation of the *i``lasthrion* as the place of atonement, in my estimation, is closer to the Old

occurrence of the verb *i``laskomai* when the publican asks for forgiveness in Luke 18:13 he writes: “the publican says to God: *ἵλασθαι*, show Thyself propitious to me, which is equivalent to: forgive me.”

¹¹ C. H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1954), 54.

¹² Dunn, James D. G., *Romans* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 171. Greathouse and Lyons, *Romans 1-8*, 125.

¹³ Frank J. Matera, *Romans, Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 98–99.

Testament meaning of the term, but, as we will see in the second chapter, the rituals surrounding the mercy seat may have a more specific significance than just atonement.

The lexically most supported interpretation of *ἵλαστήριον* as mercy-seat has met with criticism as well: Some contend that *ἵλαστήριον* always comes with an article and Paul's anarthrous use of it indicates that he is speaking in mere abstract terms here.¹⁴ Daniel P. Bailey argues conversely that Philo uses the *ἵλαστήριον* without article while clearly referring to the covering of the ark.¹⁵ Another problem invoked by C. E. B. Cranfield is that in interpreting *ἵλαστήριον* as mercy seat, one would make Christ the antitypical priest, sacrifice and place of sprinkling, which to him would seem "excessively harsh and confusing."¹⁶ This objection has been met for example by Robert Jewett who argues that the Day of Atonement essentially served to cleanse the desert sanctuary in order to make it fit for further service, thereby consecrating a new and functional sanctuary. Jesus then is the new revelation of God's presence on earth and the new functional means of atonement.¹⁷ We will later see how it can be plausible that Christ is the sacrifice, the priest, and the place of sprinkling. Even if he is just the priest and the sacrifice, he interacts with himself, being passive and active at the same time.

¹⁴ Cranfield, C. E. B, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 214–15. Stott, *Romans*, 114.

¹⁵ Daniel P. Bailey, "Jesus as the Mercy Seat: The Semantics and Theology of Paul's Use of *Hilasterion* in Romans 3:25," *Tyndale Bulletin* 51, no. 1 (2000): 155–58, 156. See as well: Wolfgang Kraus, *Der Tod Jesu als Heiligtumsweihe: Eine Untersuchung zum Umfeld der Sühnevorstellungen in Römer 3,25-26a*, Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament, vol. 66 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991), 21. 151.

¹⁶ Cranfield, C. E. B, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 215. Stott, *Romans*, 114.

¹⁷ Jewett, *Romans*, 287. See also Schreiner, *Romans*, 232.

Another argument against interpreting *ἰσθρῖον* as the mercy seat is that Paul would not liken Christ to a piece of inanimate furniture.¹⁸ This, I believe fails to take into account the high regard that the Hebrew faith placed on the Ark of the Covenant. It was after all the most holy object in the most holy place in the most holy building in the most holy city surrounded by the most holy nation. Seen only once a year on a most holy day by the most holy person of the most holy family in the most holy tribe, there is no reason why Paul would shy away from identifying it as a type of Christ. Furthermore, if a dumb beast, sold in the market, handled by rough and sinful hands and slaughtered in the thousands can represent Christ, then the mercy seat is not at all an inappropriate image for the son of God.

Another objection to the translation of *ἰσθρῖον* as the mercy seat is derived from a supposed lack of Levitical imagery in the book of Romans.¹⁹ Contrary to this however, Paul does present the Old Testament sacrifices and rituals as void by identifying them as symbols for Christ.²⁰ It is worth noticing that blood as a means of atonement is a piece of Levitical imagery on its own and should not be discounted. The blood as means of atonement in the OT is demonstrably in view in “*ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι*”. Schreiner further lists Rom 5:1-2, 9-10; 8:3 as pointing to Levitical imagery.²¹ Given the overwhelming number of instances in which *ἰσθρῖον* is the translation

¹⁸ Cranfield, C. E. B, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 215. Stott, *Romans*, 114.

¹⁹ Cranfield, C. E. B, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 215. Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 151.

²⁰ Schreiner, *Romans*, 195.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 194.

of $\tau\rho, \rho\omicron\kappa;$ in the Old Testament (and considering that it is used in a cultic context even where it is not the mercy seat), the word itself would in any other situation serve as evidence for the presence of Levitical imagery.²²

In my estimation, the objections to this conclusion are not grounded in lexical or context analysis,²³ but instead in the view that Pauline salvation theology always demands the thing that brings about the righteousness of God to be a sacrifice or the effect of a sacrifice. The mercy seat however is neither. Thus, a possible solution is to try and find an aspect of the word $\iota\lambda\sigma\theta\rho\iota\omicron\nu$ or the mercy seat itself that is either a sacrifice, or the effect of a sacrifice. Another plausible reason for the relative lack of scholarly support for the interpretation of $\iota\lambda\sigma\theta\rho\iota\omicron\nu$ as mercy seat, is that the immediately following phrase “through faith, in his blood,” poses an obstacle to a smooth translation of $\iota\lambda\sigma\theta\rho\iota\omicron\nu$ as mercy seat – we will take a look at that in the following sections.

The SDA Bible Commentary and the Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology do not take much notice of this passage in regard to its possible bearing on the sanctuary, and understand $\iota\lambda\sigma\theta\rho\iota\omicron\nu$ as propitiatory sacrifice (wholly derived from the meaning of the cognate verb) rather than a direct reference to Lev 16.²⁴ While I can only guess the reasons for this choice, I suggest that the Adventist understanding of the

²² Kraus, *Der Tod Jesu als Heiligtumsweihe*, 31.

²³ *Ibid.*, 151.

²⁴ Raoul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Reference Series, vol. 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 178-179; 284-285. Francis D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary: Acts - Ephesians*, Commentary Reference Series, vol. 6 (Washington DC: Review and Herald Publishing, 1980), 505–06.

Day of Atonement as foreshadowing a heavenly event beginning in 1844 makes Adventist scholars wary of every interpretation that seemingly places a part of this ritual into the first century.

Christ Publicly Displayed

Having presented a case for reading Paul's use of *ilsthron* as a reference to the mercy seat in the Old Testament, the next step is to determine what God's action toward Christ relative to the *ilsthron* is. To this end, a careful examination of the divine action is in order.

Romans 3:25 states: "whom God displayed publicly [*protiqhmi*] as mercy seat." Even though the verb *protiqhmi* can be understood as "resolving" or "purposing", it is commonly rendered "publicly displayed"²⁵ in Rom 3:25. This meaning is well attested in non-biblical Greek. Its earliest attested meaning was "to set before" or "to place before" in a local sense. It was used for example to describe the display of a deceased or the public declaration of a law.²⁶ Both these meanings remind us strongly of the death of Christ and the proclamation of the validity of God's law in the context of God's mercy, which makes it a very fitting word for Paul to use in this place. The meaning "to purpose" or "to plan" is derived from the earlier meaning in the sense that one lays out his/her purpose for example in a preface of a speech. This is also appropriate given the fact that the sacrifice of Christ was a "laying out" of God's plan to save humanity – as Jesus "was foreknown

²⁵ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 232.

²⁶ Hesiod, *Theogones*, 537 and Aristoteles, *Politie*, VI, 8, p. 1322a, 9 as cited in Christian Maurer, "*protiqhmi*," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: T-U*, ed. Kittel, Gerhard, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 361.

before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you (1 Pet 1:20).” In the Old Testament, the verb is used for the laying out of the showbread in Ex 29:23; 40:4.23; Lev 24:8.²⁷ The cultic tone²⁸ of Romans 3 in regard to the *i`lasthrion* and blood (*aima*) therefore also may point in the direction of showing rather than purposing. Logically, “to plan” seems to be in need of a verbal (nominalized or infinitive) correspondence, for planning and purposing happen in regard to actions, not things or persons. Even though Cranfield makes a good case for “purpose” and presents evidence that this is not as strong an argument as it would seem, because some of the church-fathers have read “purpose” here,²⁹ the object “Christ Jesus” in the accusative might make it more probable that Paul has a public demonstration in mind.

It should be noted that *protiqhmi* in the NT is mostly used to describe human planning (Act 11:23; 27:13; 2 Tim 3:10), but in those cases it has a verbal reference. The cognate noun *proqesijis* also used to describe God’s eternal purpose in Rom 8:28; 9:11. The interpretation of *protiqhmi* in Romans 3 as “setting forth publicly” therefore cannot be taken as self-evident. Even so, there are other words in the passage that imply a

²⁷ Dunn, James D. G., *Romans*, 170. A third option is offered by Greathouse and Lyons, *Romans 1-8*, 125. They argue that setting forth is cultic in meaning – in the sense that God offered Christ as a *i`lasthrion*, which is understood as a designation for an atoning sacrifice. This view on the verb is dependent on the view on *i`lasthrion*, and I don’t see that there is a basis for the assertion that it is a sacrifice.

²⁸ Cranfield, C. E. B, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 210.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 209. Even if purposing or planning is in view here, there is an implied verbal meaning in the phrase “whom God purposed as a *i`lasthrion*.” The most natural understanding of the phrase then is that God had the purpose for Christ to be the *i`lasthrion*.

certain level of publicity: *eiĵ endeixin* (for a proof) and *proj thn endeixin* (for a sign). Even if *protiqhmi* is a reference to God’s purpose that does not rule out³⁰ any sense of demonstration, given the other indicators for a deliberately public action.³¹

By Faith, in His Blood

As stated above, some proponents of all major interpretations regarding *i`lasthrion* recognize that Paul is making a reference to the mercy seat of the Old Testament. Many however understand the reference as being to the supposed function of the mercy seat rather than the mercy seat itself. The understanding of this function in turn is determined by the interpretation of the immediate context in Rom 3:25: “whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith,” (NASB) as well as on the perceived meaning of the mercy seat in the Old Testament.³² Other translations read “through faith in his blood,” (KJV/NIV) the order of which is closer to the Greek *dia. pi, stewj evn tw/| auvtou/ ai[mati*.

The meaning of the phrase “through faith, in his blood,” is ambivalent. “Through faith” (*dia. pi, stewj*) is usually associated with the way humans may gain salvation and the full phrase “through faith in his blood” (*evn tw/| auvtou/ ai[mati*) may be understood as describing the way for humans to gain or appropriate the *i`lasthrion*: The *i`lasthrion* becomes mine / is effective on my behalf if I have faith in his

³⁰ Talbert, *Romans*, 113.

³¹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 197.

³² Talbert, *Romans*, 115.

(Christ's) blood.³³ However, Jewett³⁴ contends that the phrase "in his blood" does not designate blood as the object of faith, but rather shows that the *i``lasthrion* works only in connection to the blood. The blood is then understood as shorthand for the sacrificial death of Christ, through which he could be the *i``lasthrion*.³⁵ The phrase "by faith" in Jewett's approach is understood as a parenthesis, so that Christ is indeed presented "in his blood," while "by faith" is a description of the human response. The interpretation of the blood as a reference to the death of Christ as instrumental in his being displayed as the *i``lasthrion* is very convincing, but as I would argue, that *pistij* here plays a different role.

Rendering *i``lasthrion* mercy seat does not fit easily with Jewett's interpretation of the phrase "by faith, in his blood," because "mercy seat" generally is not an action or something that is to be achieved. One problem is that while one part of the phrase refers to what Christ has done in order to make it possible for God to display him as the *i``lasthrion*, the other part refers to what humans must do to take advantage of it. This is only possible if the *i``lasthrion* is something to be appropriated by humans.

It is doubtful, however, that the phrase describes what humans need to do in order to appropriate the *i``lasthrion*. As it stands grammatically, the phrase "through faith," should be viewed as describing God's action of setting forth/displaying Christ. The

³³ Jewett, *Romans*, 288.

³⁴ Ibid. See also Lenski, *Romans*, 255.

³⁵ Greathouse and Lyons, *Romans 1-8*, 127.

preceding action is what is achieved by the means introduced by *dia*. The preceding action is not the *i`lasthrion*, but God's public display of Christ as the *i`lasthrion*. Thus the phrase "*dia. pi, stewj*" should be understood as describing the means by which God publicly displayed Christ, not the means by which humans can appropriate the *i`lasthrion* for themselves. The only verb in the clause "whom God displayed publicly as a *i`lasthrion* through faith, in his blood," (*o]n proe, qeto o` qeo.j i`lasth,rion dia. pi, stewj evn tw/| auvtou/ ai[mati*) has God as the subject and there is no grammatical reason to postulate a change of subject in the second half of the clause. The following clause "this was to demonstrate his righteousness" gives no indication for a change in the subject either, but rather continues with the same train of thought: God does something by means of something in order to accomplish something. The subject of whatever is done "through faith," therefore is God, and thus, it becomes unlikely that salvation by faith is referred to in this phrase, even though it is mentioned in the preceding verses.

Another explanation for the presence of "through faith" is that it is a Pauline addition to a hymnic fragment in Romans 3:24-25 from the Jewish-Christian tradition. It is then taken to grammatically function as a parenthesis ameliorating the ritual emphasis of the original source.³⁶ One could say that Paul is bringing in the fragment to give his argument weight by referring to tradition, but he changes what it says by inserting his own theology, emphasizing faith over ritual. The main arguments for the theory that Paul has

³⁶ For more detail, see Ralph P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 81–89. See also Jewett, *Romans*, 287.

inserted a hymnic fragment is the amount of words not found anywhere else in his writings as well as the style. I believe given the evidence that it is certainly possible that Paul used a traditional source in his own writings. The question then is, what this would mean for the interpretation of the text. Even if there is a hymnic fragment, that would not prove that “by faith” is necessarily functioning as a parenthesis indicating human faith in God. Even if Paul has appropriated a piece of tradition here, he is still able to make sure that the final form of the text says what he wants it to say, including those words that he does not use anywhere else. I would therefore argue that in order to interpret the text, we need to primarily consider its final form, especially in cases where we do not have access to the theorized original source. If Romans 3:24-26 is then read in its final form, the phrase “by faith,” whether Paul added it to a hymnic fragment or not, given the evidence presented above, is unlikely to refer to human faith.

Concerning “evn tw/| auvtou/ ai[mati,” it is important to keep in mind that if en denotes instrumentality, it does not point to whatever the function of the i`lasthrion is, but to the activity that is described before – that is the setting forth, or presentation of the i`lasthrion. If this is the case, then we must search for a translation that expresses how pistij and aimatoj make this presentation possible. In this sentence, ‘God’ is the subject, ‘setting forth’ is the predicate, and the relative pronoun ‘whom’ is the object, and i`lasthrion is the object complement. ‘dia. pi,stewj evn tw/| auvtou/ ai[mati’ should thus be seen as an adverbial

phrase of manner. As such, the possibility that this phrase describes something about how humans are supposed to relate to Christ is precluded.³⁷

Consider for example P. Richard Choi's analysis in this regard. Choi approaches the clause from the perspective that the *i`lasthrion* is indeed a reference to the mercy seat and tries to give it meaning in his own translation: "whom God set forth as the mercy seat through his faithfulness, with his blood upon it."³⁸ Instead of using a generic English preposition to denote some kind of instrumental meaning for *en*, this translation tries to reflect how blood was instrumental in the rituals surrounding the mercy seat. The manner in which this occurs at the crucifixion will be laid out in the third chapter of this thesis.

Another issue needs to be addressed here before we can move on: If God did indeed through *pistij* set forth Christ as the *i`lasthrion*, it is very awkward to speak of faith, but one should instead speak about faithfulness, as Choi does in his treatment.³⁹ This interpretation is only loosely tied to the debate around the "faith of Jesus" in v. 22 and Gal 2:16; 3:22. Karl Barth as well as Sam K. Williams argue that *pistij* there should be translated faithfulness.⁴⁰ This view, while gaining more support in recent times,⁴¹ has not

³⁷ Unless again one would take *i`lasthrion* to mean something that must be attained by humans, but to make an example: "The man put up the candy dispenser through the investment of money," can hardly mean that those who want candy must invest money.

³⁸ P. Richard Choi, "The Problem of Translating *en tw autou aimati* in Romans 3:25," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 38, no. 2 (2000): 199–201, 201.

³⁹ Talbert, *Romans*, 110.

⁴⁰ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 6th (Der Römerbrief; reprint, London: Oxford University Press, 1922), 173. Sam K. Williams, *Jesus' Death as Saving Event: The Background and Origin of a Concept* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), 49.

⁴¹ Matera, *Romans*, 92–93.

gone unchallenged. An extensive collection of reasons against the view that *pistij* can be seen as the faithfulness of Christ in Romans 3:22 can be found in James Barr's *The Semantics of Biblical Language*.⁴² A complete discussion of his arguments cannot take place in this thesis, but the main thrust of his criticism is directed against the idea forwarded by Hebert and Torrance,⁴³ that the Hebrew *חַנּוּן* / should be viewed as more determinative for the meaning of *pistij* than the Greek background. His criticism on this point has generally been accepted,⁴⁴ but this has not kept scholars from seeing the possibility of *pistij* meaning faithfulness based on its use in the New Testament.⁴⁵

In Romans 3:25 however, there is no genitive connected to *pistij*, and not only the subject of faith, but also the object, if there is one, has to be gleaned from the context. There are three possibilities for the subject: God, Christ, and humans. The order of the sentence suggests that *pistij* has been instrumental in the public display of Christ as the *i`lasthrion*. Thus, since God's salvific actions are not dependent on human faith, the subject is likely to be either God or Christ. If *pistij* then is understood as belonging to God or Christ in Romans 3:25, it is necessary to choose a translation that fittingly describes

⁴² James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 161–87.

⁴³ A. G. Hebert, "'Faithfulness' and 'Faith'," *The Reformed Theological Review* 14, no. 2 (1955): 33–40. Thomas F. Torrance, "One Aspect of the Biblical Conception of Faith," *The Expository Times* 68, no. 4 (1957): 111–14. Cited in Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, 161.

⁴⁴ Jesse Paul Pollard, "The Problem of the Faith of Christ" (Dissertation, Baylor University, 1982), 107.

⁴⁵ See for example Paul J. Pollard's argument for 'faithfulness' in Romans 1:8 and 3:3 as well as Galatians 5:22. *ibid.*, 110–12.

divine pistij relative to human pistij. It simply does not make sense to speak of God's or Christ's faith. Who would they believe in? I would therefore suggest, as have others before me, that faithfulness could be a fitting translation for pistij where it is used for God or Christ.

While it is true that in the LXX, the term pistij is very rarely used to describe an attribute of God, there are a few examples where it does so⁴⁶ 1 Samuel 21:2 speaks about a place called Qeou pistij, "the faithfulness of God." In Ps 33:4 (32:4 in the LXX), the works of the Lord are en pistei, "in faith/faithfulness." Lamentations 3:23 reads eplhqunen h pistij sou, "great is your faithfulness" although it is omitted in Codices Alexandrinus and Vaticanus, and therefore not found in the standard imprints of the LXX.⁴⁷

Some New Testament instances should also be considered. In Romans 3:3, the structure as well as the context point toward pistij as an attribute of God in contrast to the faithlessness of humans. Even Dunn and Jewett, who argue for pistij in Rom 3:22, 25 to be rendered as "human faith" do see God's faithfulness here.⁴⁸ It would therefore be inaccurate to claim that faith is always our faith.

The evidence above suggests to me that the way Paul wrote points toward the phrase "dia pistij," being a description of the way God put forth Christ as i`lathrion. Therefore pistij is not man's faith, but God's faithfulness. The

⁴⁶ Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks*, 69.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Dunn, James D. G., *Romans*, 129. Jewett, *Romans*, 245.

observation that the adjective *pistoj* is often used to describe God as well as man also points toward the possibility that the noun can express a meaning correspondent to faith as it relates to God. While this is a very rare occurrence, some examples, as have been listed above, can be found. Furthermore, Romans 3:3 also corroborates that *pistij*, when describing God, is the opposite of *apistia*, and should be translated faithfulness. As Dennis C. Gaertner argues, the passage is to be understood as “theocentric” rather than anthropocentric.⁴⁹ The passage is not as much about humans and what they need to do in order to be saved as it is about God and what he needed to do in order to save us.⁵⁰

If this is so, there remains the question of whose faithfulness is in view: God, the Father’s, or Christ’s. It is not necessary for the purpose of this thesis to force a decision on this at this point. I do like how Talbert connects the phrase to the two conditions Christ had to fulfill on earth in order for his sacrifice to become effective (“Christ Jesus, whom God purposed as a locus of the divine presence and revelation through his faithfulness in his blood.”).⁵¹ But even though Christ needed to be faithful in life, and Christ needed to faithfully lay down his life in order to become the sin bearer, Paul rarely, if ever,⁵² refers

⁴⁹ Dennis Charles Gaertner, “The Righteousness of God” in Light of the Theocentric Message of Romans” (Dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986), 91.

⁵⁰ Michael P. Middendorf, *Romans 1-8*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 289.

⁵¹ Talbert, *Romans*, 110.

⁵² Texts in which Paul uses *pistij* as are Rom 3:22, 26; Gal 2:16; 3:22. In each of these cases, it is disputed whether the genitive is objective, showing that Christ is the object of faith, or subjective, showing that Christ had faith/was faithful.

to *pistij* as being the faithfulness of Christ. At this moment, the faithfulness of God appears to be a more likely interpretation.

God's Righteousness

For Martin Luther the understanding of the righteousness of God as something we are given as a gift, instead of something, by which we are judged, was a matter of life and death. As a monk, Luther was fearful of God, because in spite of great sincerity and zeal in his quest to become good enough for God, he continued to see himself as very sinful. When he discovered the good news of salvation by faith alone (*sola fide*), his entire view on God was changed. The righteousness of God, which had traditionally been taken to mean the justice of God as distributed fairly to sinner and saint, was no longer something to be afraid of, but something to celebrate and boast in. In his exposition Luther followed Augustine,⁵³ who asserts that the righteousness of God is not his own righteousness “by which God is righteous,” but the righteousness “with which he clothes a person when He justifies the ungodly.” While this understanding, which Luther applies for all occurrences of the phrase, was a major breakthrough in Luther’s personal faith and consequently shaped the history and the religious thought of Europe for centuries to come, it is today challenged by many scholars.

Disagreements exist on at least the following levels: (1) does righteousness (*dikaioSunh*) really mean the same all the time or are there variations? (2) Is the genitive to be read as an objective or subjective genitive?

⁵³ Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle of the Romans: A New Translation* by J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1976), 76.

Concerning the first question, Käsemann,⁵⁴ Bultmann,⁵⁵ and others⁵⁶ argue that it is not possible to accept the same meaning in Rom 3:21-22 and in 25-26 on the ground that the righteousness of God is applied to the believer in Rom 3:22 while it clearly denotes either an activity or an attribute of God in Rom 3:26. Other commentators feel compelled to choose one of the possible grammatical options for all occurrences.⁵⁷ These are the (a) subjective genitive – the righteousness that is produced by or goes out from God, or (b) the objective genitive – the righteousness that can validly be directed towards God, that is effective with God, but that has first been given as a gift from God – a view quite similar to that of Luther. And (c) a possessive genitive – describing an attribute of God - has recently been suggested on grounds of an etymological and grammatical investigation by Denny Burk.⁵⁸

It must be noted that the same choice in regard to the nature of the grammatical construction does not necessarily yield the exact same interpretation, as the lexical meaning of righteousness itself is not established beyond doubt. This is in part due to the different

⁵⁴ Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1969), 168.

⁵⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, "Dikaïosunh Qeou," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83, no. 1 (1964): 12–16, 14.

⁵⁶ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 219–22. See also: Roger Mohrland, Philip W. Comfort, and Gerald L. Borchert, *Romans*, Cornerstone biblical commentary, v. 14 (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007).

⁵⁷ Robert W. Wall, N. T. Wright, and J. Paul Sampley, *Acts of the Apostles, Introduction to Epistolary Literature, Letter to the Romans, First Letter to the Corinthians*, The New Interpreter's Bible, v. X (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 464. Also: Jewett, *Romans*, 272–73. Gaertner, "'The Righteousness of God' in Light of the Theocentric Message of Romans," 145–46. Matera, *Romans*, 92.

⁵⁸ Denny Burk, "The Righteousness of God (Dikaïosunē Theou) and Verbal Genitives: A Grammatical Clarification," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 34, no. 4 (2012): 346–60, 346–60.

approaches scholars have taken to tackle the question. Dennis C. Gaertner lists a good number of them in his dissertation and I am indebted to him for providing an extensive overview of this discussion.⁵⁹ In order to arrive at the respective conclusions, the investigation of the following primary backgrounds is proposed: (a) the Old Testament, (b) the use in late Judaism, (c) the sayings of Jesus, (d) pre-Pauline Christian tradition, and (e) word studies in general. Gaertner himself wants to establish that (f) the context itself should be the primary concern in this question which might gain the support of James H. Moulton who suggests that "so rich is Paul's compression of language with genitives that the attempt to define too narrowly the various types of genitive is vain; they all denote a relationship which is amplified by context."⁶⁰ It is proper to mention at this point a new and rather innovative approach suggested by Douglas Campbell to derive the meaning of *dikaiosunh* from the "meaning" of Christ since Christ is essentially the demonstration of the same. "If A is revealed definitely by B, then to know B is also to know A."⁶¹ Since the righteousness of God has been revealed in the life and death of Christ, it is possible to gain insight into the righteousness of God by looking at what Christ has revealed about him during his earthly ministry. The implications of this thought are far-reaching and would be worthy of further study, that cannot be done within the constraints of this thesis. However, since the righteousness of God is revealed in Christ, and since the righteousness

⁵⁹ Gaertner, "'The Righteousness of God' in Light of the Theocentric Message of Romans," 26–40.

⁶⁰ James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1906), 212.

⁶¹ Douglas Atchison Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: an Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 2009), 683–84.

of God is specifically said to have been demonstrated by means of the public display of Christ as the *i`lasthrion*, Campbell's thoughts seem to support the general idea of a typological connection between Christ and the *i`lasthrion*.

Given the fact that most commentators see shades of different meanings in the term, it is not feasible in this paper to discuss all possibilities. Instead I will focus on making a case for a wide and inclusive meaning of the term "righteousness of God" in Rom 3:25, 26 that integrates his justice and his truthfulness, which entails his faithfulness toward his covenant promises. Thus, it includes his promise to save those sinners that believe in him as well as his promise to bless "all the families of the earth" in Abraham (Gen 12:3). Righteousness includes that God does what he says he will do.⁶²

Most of the time, *dikaiosunh* is explained as dependent on a verb, *dikaiow*, and therefore is taken to implicitly denote action, which requires an object or a subject. Hence the general agreement on either a subjective or an objective genitive.⁶³ Burk argues however, that *dikaiosunh* is not derived from a verb, but from an adjective. His proof includes a survey of all *-sunh* words in the Bible, which he argues are without exception derived from adjectives rather than verbs. A possible comparison in English would be the words ending in *-ness*. Therefore he concludes: "The noun *dikaiosunh* is not the nominalization of verbal action," and consequently argues: "so it cannot have an implied

⁶² cf. N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 148-9, 238.

⁶³ Jewett, *Romans*, 272-73. Also: Burk, "The Righteousness of God (*Dikaiosunē* Theou) and Verbal Genitives," 349.

subject.”⁶⁴ Since the meaning of justice or integrity – the attributes of a fair judge are apparent in all words of the *dik* – family, the righteousness of God in Rom 3:25 cannot but, among other things, carry the meaning of fair, distributive justice. ⁶⁵

The context in Romans 3:5 also supports the idea of righteousness as attribute. Gaertner⁶⁶ and Thielman⁶⁷ observe the juxtaposition of human unrighteousness and God’s righteousness in 3:5 as well as its link with faithfulness and truthfulness in 3:3-4, which shows that at least when pertaining to humans, righteousness can describe an attribute. However, there are a number of instances in the LXX in which righteousness (*dikaiosunh*) is something that can also be done or even spoken, especially by kings (e.g. LXX: Gen 18:19; 1 Ki 10:9; 2 Chr 9:8; Ps 57:2; 119:121; Isa 58:2; Jer 22:3, 15; 23:5; Ezek 3:20; 18:19). In two instances the same can be observed in the New Testament (1 Jo 3:10; Rev 22:11). Thus, righteousness is not only used as an attribute, but is used by extension as righteous behavior. Nevertheless, in this instance, I believe that Paul is emphasizing God’s righteousness as his attribute of righteousness, from which his righteous deeds flow.

As God’s character is in complete accordance with his will (which is revealed in his law), the properties of his character will be acted upon eventually. Conversely, if humanity can

⁶⁴ Ibid., 351.

⁶⁵ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 175.

⁶⁶ Gaertner, ""The Righteousness of God" in Light of the Theocentric Message of Romans," 136.

⁶⁷ Frank Thielman, "God's Righteousness as God's Fairness in Romans 1:17: An Ancient Perspective on a Significant Phrase," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54, no. 1 (2011): 35–48, 46.

observe an action of God it can be sure that this action is not out of sync with his character. A strict differentiation between righteousness as attribute and righteousness as an action is therefore somewhat artificial.

Moo interprets *dikaiosunh* to be a “general reference to God’s ‘consistency’ in always acting in accordance with his own character.”⁶⁸ Not all, probably not even most commentators agree with Moo’s point of view, but most of them must consent that this definition is by no means exclusive. In fact, it can easily incorporate such concepts as the faithfulness of God toward his covenant or his eschatological saving activity, because it denies the artificial gap between the character and actions of God. What is important, however, and Moo rightly points to it, is that “his righteousness” must have reference to some aspect of God’s character that might have been called into question” by his merciful treatment of sin in the past.⁶⁹

Righteousness in the LXX is the attribute of those who are in agreement with God (Gen 15:6; 18:19; Ps 7:8; 18:20) – he who is righteous does not need anything else to be at peace with the Lord and the keeping of all commandments seem to be incorporated in the term righteousness. Righteousness is not merited according to works performed, as pointed out by Paul in Romans 3:10-22, but according to faith.⁷⁰ Genesis 15:6 is the first occurrence of *dikaiosunh* in the LXX and describes the way God sees Abraham after the

⁶⁸ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 240.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ See above about the discussions around the “faith of/in Christ.” The phrase “for all who believe,” in Romans 3:22 shows that faith is the appropriate human response to the divine solution for sin, regardless of whether Christ’s faith is important to this solution or not.

expression of his faith. This for Paul is the paradigm of righteousness for human beings (Rom 4). But righteousness is also an attribute of God and a quality of his activities (Ps 11:7; 35:24; Ps 47:11; 51:14). Therefore, I would speak of righteousness as a necessary quality of God's character – righteousness as essential to his goodness, with a special emphasis, in this context, on his fairness as a judge. The context then determines which aspects of the righteousness of God must be proven consistent in Rom 3:25. The solution offered by Moo, but others as well,⁷¹ on account of Rom 3:26 that his will and promise to save must remain in agreement with his justice, appears to be quite accurate. This view on atonement is of course associated with Anselm of Canterbury's satisfaction theory and the view of the reformers that came to be known as the penal substitution theory, in which a righteous God, because of his holiness, cannot acquit the sinner and therefore sends the innocent son of God to die in his stead. While there has always been opposition to this view, I believe the theory does describe an aspect of the cross that is found in scripture.⁷²

In regard to the occurrences of *dikaiosunē* θεοῦ in Romans 3:21-22, it would be logically consistent to argue that here again God's righteousness as a quality of his character is referred to, but this time it is God's righteousness revealed in Christ and

⁷¹ Wall, Wright and Sampley, *Acts of the Apostles, Introduction to Epistolary Literature, Letter to the Romans, First Letter to the Corinthians*, 477. Gaertner, "'The Righteousness of God' in Light of the Theocentric Message of Romans," 100.

⁷² Stott, *Romans*, 112. "How can God justify the wicked? In the Old Testament he repeatedly to the Israelite judges that they must justify the righteous and condemn the wicked. But of course! An innocent person must be declared innocent, and a guilty person guilty. What more elementary principle of Justice could be enunciated? For he declares of himself, 'I will not acquit the guilty,' or 'I will not justify the wicked.' But of course! we say again. God would not dream of such a thing. Then how on earth can Paul affirm that God does what he forbids others to do?"

imputed and imparted to humans.⁷³ Humans are given to be a partaker of the divine as he receives by grace the righteousness of God and thereby becomes truly righteous himself. We thereby no longer need to claim an awkward change of meaning between Romans 3:21,22 and vv. 25,26, a problem, which has often been recognized and which has led to the critique of most approaches.⁷⁴ I would argue that the four occurrences of righteousness in Romans 3:21-26 speak about the same thing, but in different contexts: When Paul tells his readers in vv. 21-22 about God's righteousness, he speaks about the righteousness of God as of his attribute that is made available for humans to claim through Christ, by faith. In Romans 3:25-26, he speaks about God's righteousness as of his attribute again, but this time emphasizes how the righteousness of God is demonstrated, as we shall explore in the following section.

In the following sections I will refer to the righteousness of God as an attribute that, contains more than just God's righteousness as a judge, but if God is a judge, then his being righteous includes his being just in the sense that he gives to each one what is deserved. In the context of Romans 3:25, where his righteousness seems to be in need of demonstration

⁷³ Imputed righteousness is the righteousness that humans possess in the eyes of God when the sacrifice of Christ becomes effective for their sakes. By accepting that Christ has died on my behalf, I also accept his life instead of mine, so that I am before God as if I had never sinned. Imparted righteousness on the other hand is the righteousness that I can live out in my life with the help of the Spirit after I have given my life to Christ (Gal 2:20). This idea is often described in terms of justification and sanctification.

⁷⁴ Gaertner, ""The Righteousness of God" in Light of the Theocentric Message of Romans," 145–46. "the structure of Romans 3:1-26 does not allow for such drastic breaks in flow of argument so as to alter the sense of "the righteousness of God" in this passage."

because of his merciful forbearance toward those who have sinned in the past, my interpretation emphasizes this aspect.

Does God Really Need to Prove His Righteousness?

In Romans 3:25b-26a, with the phrase “This was to demonstrate (ε;ndeixin) his righteousness, because he passed over (paresij) the sins previously committed in the forbearance (anoch) of God,” Paul confronts his readers with a situation that implies a challenge to the righteousness of God.

endeixij is either translated proof or demonstration by all commentators. According to Jewett it is both.⁷⁵ Michael P. Middendorf advocates the translation proof, because he believes it to be more fitting for the legal context of question about the righteousness of God.⁷⁶ The terms proof and demonstration are used synonymously in most disciplines that involve the presentation of arguments, so it is perhaps not necessary at this point to make a clear cut decision here. It is important however to point out that both proof and demonstration are done for things that already are true, but are not visible or evident. In this particular case, Paul does not suggest that God is, or was at any time in the past, not righteous, but that it was not obvious to the audience of the demonstration. Questions arise for what reason God’s righteousness is demonstrated or proven.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Jewett, *Romans*, 288.

⁷⁶ Middendorf, *Romans 1-8*, 274.

⁷⁷ Jewett, *Romans*, 289.

The motivation for his demonstration might be seen as his general will to reveal himself and his faithfulness⁷⁸ to humanity but could also address an apparent conflict about his righteousness.⁷⁹ In my estimation, the phrase “because he passed over (paresij) the sins previously committed in the forbearance (anoch) of God,” supports the second view by introducing a more definite motivation for the aforementioned demonstration: anoch is usually translated “forbearance,”⁸⁰ but has been interpreted as forgiveness or release by Campbell.⁸¹ Reasons lie in extra-biblical use as a legal term for forgiveness or abstaining from meting out punishment, and in theological consideration. More commonly however, “forbearance” or “a passing over” is preferred as rendering for anoch,⁸² for Romans 3:25b-26a does not necessarily describe forgiveness, but is concerned with the way God has dealt with sin in the OT. Moulton supports this observation with examples from extra biblical sources.⁸³ It is clear with both possible meanings that paresij describes God’s dealing with sin in the time before the cross – and that this dealing with sin is not according to what is due, but according to his forbearance (anoch). What can thus definitely be said about the underlying concept is that God has given to humanity much more good than it deserved. The question here again is whether the forbearance of God makes a proof of his

⁷⁸ Wall, Wright and Sampley, *Acts of the Apostles, Introduction to Epistolary Literature, Letter to the Romans, First Letter to the Corinthians*, 467.

⁷⁹ Gaertner, “The Righteousness of God” in Light of the Theocentric Message of Romans,” 115–16.

⁸⁰ Schlier, “anecw, anektoj, anoch,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: A-G*, ed. Kittel, Gerhard, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 359.

⁸¹ Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: an Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul*, 670.

⁸² Jewett, *Romans*, 290.

⁸³ Kraus, *Der Tod Jesu als Heiligtumsweihe*, 100–01.

righteousness necessary.⁸⁴ This of course is dependent on the definition of righteousness and on the function of *dia* in the sentence. As *dia* with accusative can denote the reason or the motivation for an action, and as righteousness in this context cannot really be argued to completely lack the aspect of distributive justice, which must be part of God's good character, it seems very likely that indeed God's passing over of sins according to his forbearance appears to conflict with his justice as one aspect of his righteousness⁸⁵ and constitutes a reason⁸⁶ for the later demonstration of the consistency of his actions with his justice. Not only grammatically, but theologically as well does it make good sense to view his forbearance toward the sinners as something that appears to be out of character with the justice of God. As Stott puts it succinctly:

How can God justify the wicked? In the Old Testament he repeatedly told the Israelite judges that they must justify the righteous and condemn the wicked. But of course! An innocent person must be declared innocent, and a guilty person guilty. What more elementary principle of Justice could be enunciated?

For he declares of himself, "I will not acquit the guilty," or "I will not justify the wicked." But of course! we say again. God would not dream of such a thing. Then how on earth can Paul affirm that God does what he forbids others to do?⁸⁷

Biblical thought holds that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb 9:22). On the other hand, "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb 10:4). The sacrifices of the OT, as most Christians have asserted, were types of Christ – they were not effective in themselves, as also indicated by Paul in other instances,⁸⁸ but were an expression of faith in the promise of God to deliver a perfect

⁸⁴ Talbert, *Romans*, 115–16.

⁸⁵ Mohrlang, Comfort and Borchert, *Romans*, 69.

⁸⁶ Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 268.

⁸⁷ Stott, *Romans*, 112. See also Middendorf, *Romans 1-8*, 292.

⁸⁸ Schreiner, *Romans*, 195.

sacrifice that could indeed atone for sin. Therefore the forbearance of God, the “patient delay” of punishment,⁸⁹ was only possible due to his plan to one day sacrifice His Son and make him the *ilasthrion*.⁹⁰

Continuing with the theme of divine vindication in Romans 3:27, at least one of the reasons for the demonstration is God’s passing over the sins that were previously committed. As a demonstration is designed to show something that was unknown or obscured to the target-audience, it must be concluded that the activity of forgiving or showing forbearance has, in view of the target-audience, obscured the righteousness of God, specifically the aspect of God’s righteousness as a judge. The consistency of his mercy with his justice must therefore be shown by presenting Christ as *ilasthrion*. Christ being the *ilasthrion* must then in some manner address a perceived accountability of God for the sins of the past that were not punished. The importance of Christ’s role in the demonstration of the righteousness of God of course does in no wise subtract from his mission to “proclaim the release of the captives, and the recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed,” (Lu 4:18) which has been forwarded as reason for his coming in connection with an understanding of the righteousness of God as a gift or a salvific power. It is on the contrary the great beauty of the gospel that God does all of that without violating a single aspect of his righteousness, even when justice is considered to be one of them.

⁸⁹ Middendorf, *Romans 1-8*, 290.

⁹⁰ Cranfield, C. E. B, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 212.

That He May Be Just: More than Just Appearances!

The last phrase of verse 26, “that he be just (*dikaion*) and justifying (*dikaionta*) him who is of the faith of Christ” is ambiguous. The following questions concerning this passage must be asked in order to establish an interpretative frame.

(1) How should *ειj* be translated in this context? And in direct dependence of this question: what is the significance of *einai*? (2) What is the meaning of *dikaioj* in this context? (3) What is the meaning of *kai* – concessive or complementary or even instrumental?

The meaning of *ειj* is usually local, but can, as it is in this case, have a final meaning: the demonstration of God’s righteousness happened in order to arrive at a certain destination which is that he “is just and justifies him who is of faith in Christ.”⁹¹ It is now crucial to note that the demonstration is not just about appearances. Schreiner argues that even though God’s “display of righteousness is not imposed from without,” it “is an expression of his own righteous character and nature.” From this follows, that “by demonstrating his saving and judging righteousness, God has vindicated His name before the world,”⁹² Cranfield even goes so far to assert that “God would not be righteous, if he neglected to show Himself to be righteous: it is essential to His being righteous, the loving and merciful God, that he should show that he is righteous.”⁹³ Both draw on the presence of *einai* in the sentence, which they argue cannot be made to have the meaning of “appear”,

⁹¹ Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 143.

⁹² Schreiner, *Romans*, 198–99.

⁹³ Cranfield, C. E. B, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 214; Schreiner, *Romans*, 199.

but must be translated “be”. Nevertheless, Cranfield’s assertion must be thought of as a difficulty in the logic order of the text: While the atoning and vicarious sacrifice of Christ certainly is necessary to maintain God’s righteousness even though he forgives the sinner, it takes the argument one step further to assert that the demonstration of his righteousness was necessary for him to be righteous/just and justifying. We must distinguish here between truth and proof. While I believe it is correct as Schreiner states, that the motivation for both making Christ the *i`lasthrion* and presenting him as the *i`lasthrion* comes from the same source, the loving and righteous character of God, it is difficult to assert that without demonstration of this truth, it does not exist, which appears to be what Cranfield is saying. Indeed there is a certain mysteriousness about God (Job 38-41). Reason is given in the OT to trust in God’s faithfulness and that it is good for a man to believe in him, but the story of Job also emphasizes that God is unsearchable and not accountable to anyone. This motif continues in the New Testament, even though the revelation of God is expanded: God is love (1 Jo 4:16), and he is faithful (1 Co 1:9; 10:13), but humans cannot yet approach God without faith (Heb 11:6; 1 Co 13:2,9-13; Rom 9:19-21). There is still need for faith because the promise to the believer does not end with the demonstration of God’s righteousness but will only be consummated when eternal life and damnation is conferred upon each justly, and when “we see him as he is.” If God were to continue to hide his righteousness indefinitely, the conflict concerning his character could never be resolved. To tolerate this consequence one could argue, would not be congruent with the character of God, because it would prolong doubt and suffering in his creation. Thus demonstrating his character seems to be in the interest of God given what we know about

his goal for humanity and the universe, but it would go too far, I think, to postulate an absolute dependence of the fact of God's righteousness on the demonstration of God's righteousness. The point here is simply that I hold God to be righteous, even if I do not know about it and therefore I hesitate, to go so far as to say that God could not be righteous unless he reveals himself as such.⁹⁴

There has never been, nor will there ever be, a time in which God was unrighteous or intended to do something unrighteous. He is righteous in every aspect of his being, and Paul, in his letter to the Romans, has no doubt about it. Even during the time in which God had shown forbearance toward sin, without having given a sacrifice for sin before, he was righteous because in his decision to mercifully save humanity, Christ's being the sacrifice and the *ilasthrion* was already present. While the public display of Christ was necessary in order to prove the consistency of his character in the face of the apparent discrepancy between his righteousness and his merciful treatment of the sinner, the display in itself is not the reason for his righteousness. Making Christ the *ilasthrion* and publicly displaying him are two different actions, both of which are expressions of the character of God, who always acts in agreement with his own character. The motive for God to show his righteousness comes from same source as the desire to maintain it, his love (Rom 5:8), and thus the public display of Christ as the *ilasthrion*, gives twofold evidence of God's character: He is righteous as a judge, because his forbearance

⁹⁴ This is actually a point that has some importance to me in my personal faith, since I do not know in detail how God will, for example, treat those who never had an opportunity to hear the gospel in the judgement, or the mentally ill. I have to trust him to be righteous even though his righteousness has not yet been fully revealed to me.

toward sin is justified by the ministry of Christ as the *ἰσθρῖον*, and he desires to be known by us, which is a witness to his righteous love.

Just and Justifying

We are now ready to move to the interesting juxtaposition of the adjective “just” and the verbal cognate “to justify.” *dikaioj* is the cognate of *dikaiousnh*. The fact that *dikaioj* is more closely related to *dikaiousnh* than *dikaiow* has been shown by Burk.⁹⁵ It is definitely used to describe a person whose just standing is acknowledged by God, who must therefore have been made just by God before, in Romans 1:17; 2:13; 5:19; it is however also used to describe the law in 7:12 and is an attribute that no human has in himself in 3:10. One could assert on the basis of 7:12, that someone whose life is in accordance with the law can be called righteous. But only God can bring a sinner into accordance with the law. Now, it is obvious that God cannot confer upon humans that which he does not have or command – therefore he who justifies must be just. But at the same time it is clear, from what has been shown to this point, that the justification of the sinner places doubt on God’s righteousness. This of course has an obvious reason – namely that as the law is just, so the judge must be just. We are thereby pointed to the distributive justice of a fair judge, a concept associated with the term *dikaioj* in non-biblical usage for example with Aristoteles,⁹⁶ as well as in the LXX: Psalm 7:12; 11:7; 119:137; 129:4;

⁹⁵ Burk, "The Righteousness of God (*Dikaiousnē Theou*) and Verbal Genitives," 351. See also 2.1

⁹⁶ Gottlob Schrenk, "*dikaiousnh*," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: D-H*, ed. Kittel, Gerhard, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 193.

Proverbs 21:15; Job 31:6;⁹⁷ Isaiah 32:1; Jeremiah 11:20; 12:1; 42:5; Lamentations 1:18; Ezekiel 18:8; Daniel 9:14; Zechariah 7:9. But it must be mentioned that *dikaioj* in the LXX and in the NT most of the time describes the one who is in right standing with God. His righteousness encompasses his right conduct in every aspect of life. This needs to be contrasted with the assertion that no one is righteous in and of him- or herself in Rom 3:10-19. Most commentators agree that *dikaioj* in 3:26b at least carries the notion of God being just, a fair judge.⁹⁸ But to see the term *dikaioj*, the adjective from which *dikaiosunh* is derived, as describing only God's judging fairness would be shortsighted. As the definition of righteousness encompasses his whole character, so does *dikaioj* in this instance contain more than distributive justice.⁹⁹ However, God's fairness certainly is of concern in this instance since the background of v. 25b reveals the conflict between God's forbearance and justice, which could only be solved by the purposing of Christ as the *i`lasthrion*.¹⁰⁰

Kai in this specific place, according to Jewett, has basically four different possible meanings: "(a) copulative, indicating that God both shows his righteousness and sets people right and that the two acts are not contradictory; (b) intensive, ascensive, or

⁹⁷ God being righteous is a prominent theme in Job – but it is viewed from another perspective – that of suffering. See also: Job 36:3.

⁹⁸ Bultmann, "Dikaiosunh Qeou," 13. Mohrlang, Comfort and Borchert, *Romans*, 69. Burk, "The Righteousness of God (Dikaiosunē Theou) and Verbal Genitives," 358.

⁹⁹ See for example Isa 45:21; 61:8; Jer 23:5; Zec 9:9 for *dikaioj* clearly denoting God's saving properties.

¹⁰⁰ Craig S. Keener, *Romans*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 59.

concessive indicating that God maintains righteousness even while setting right the wicked; (c) instrumental, insisting that God maintains righteousness by means of setting people right; or (d) explicative, either showing how God can accept sinners without polluting his justice, a translation that reflects the classic dilemma of Anselmian atonement theory, or explaining "that God is right within the very act of rightwishing" the faithful because he "reaches out ... to draw the believer" into the realm of righteousness."¹⁰¹

For Jewett, the most likely interpretation is explicative: God shows within the act of justifying that he is just. Systematically this would reflect that a righteous God always keeps his promises. Because of the promise given in the covenant to Abraham he is righteous even because he is justifying him who has the faith in Jesus. This short treatment of the function of *kai* only serves to show that it does not stand in the way of understanding the passage as dealing with an apparent tension between God's actions and his character. If one of the possible meanings is to be chosen, the context is to be given preference in deciding it. Since these two verses do speak about a perceived conflict between God's righteousness and his dealings with sinful humanity, I would view *kai* here as having an explicative function, showing that because of Christ's public display as the *i`lasthriou* God can justify the sinner while being righteous at the same time. In this perceived conflict between God's justice and his mercy, God's righteousness is demonstrated, and the tension resolved, by means of the public display of Christ as the

¹⁰¹ Jewett, *Romans*, 292.

in the last hour and thus Paul can be confident in claiming that God is “just and the justifier of the one who has the faith in Jesus.”

Romans 3:25 in the Context of Romans 1-3

The general thrust of the Romans is not, as is often assumed, a description of humanity’s way to salvation. As Frank Matera argues, “From start to finish, Romans is about God.”¹⁰² While this could be said about the whole Bible, I believe it to be true in a special sense here, because Paul is specifically speaking about the character of God. Paul preaches the gospel, which is in Christ. Christ, to the Romans, also was a reference to an ignoble death at the cross, but Paul is not ashamed, because in the gospel, “the righteousness of God is revealed” (Rom 1:17). This text serves as a statement for the theme of Romans according to Dunn¹⁰³ as well as Jewett,¹⁰⁴ even though they take the righteousness of God to have a slightly different content than I have laid out above. Their view of righteousness as a saving action, however, is not excluded from the righteousness that is an attribute of God himself, but that he transfers to all those who believe (Rom 3:21). About the passages leading up to Romans 3:25-26, Middendorf writes:

At the conclusion of most sections so far, Paul’s climactic assertion has not been about humanity, but about God (e.g., 1:32; 2:11, 16, 29; all of 3:1-8; 3:19). The main point of 3:1-26, and even 3:21-26, is not, after all, about me finding a gracious God, or about humanity in general. As 3:25-26 makes clear, it is the righteousness of God.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Matera, *Romans*, 21.

¹⁰³ Dunn, James D. G., *Romans*, 47.

¹⁰⁴ Jewett, *Romans*, 135.

¹⁰⁵ Middendorf, *Romans 1-8*, 292–93.

Nevertheless, even if God's righteousness is the overarching theme so far, that does not at all negate the "significance of believing."¹⁰⁶ God's righteousness is central to faith, because it is an integral part of what is believed about God. How could we believe a God that punishes those who are not accountable for their sin (Rom 1:19)? How could we believe a God who judges sin, even though his righteousness is shown in our unrighteousness (Rom 3:5)? How can we believe a God who apparently does not punish sin, as it is his duty to do (Rom 3:25-26)? As the last of these questions are answered by Paul in Romans 3:25-26 the text, while describing an event crucial to God and his rule over the world, becomes equally important to the believer who gets an explanation for the strange behavior of God in showing forbearance toward sin and the sinner.

Conclusion

Romans 3 is to be viewed with a theocentric focus,¹⁰⁷ with an eye on the nature of God's Modus Operandi. It appears that God not only wants to save sinners, but he wants to save them without violating any rule that follows from his character. This does not fully explain the need for the demonstration of his righteousness unless there is a special reason to share the truth about his character with an audience. Whether or not only humanity constitutes this audience, apparently, God values transparency. God is concerned with the misconceptions that others have of him in regard to his dealings with sin and sinners. For some reason Christ's being publicly displayed as the *παράδειγμα* is meant to prove

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 293.

¹⁰⁷ Gaertner, "The Righteousness of God" in Light of the Theocentric Message of Romans," 91.

God's righteousness in order to solve an alleged conflict between his mercy and his justice. The obvious Anselmian take here is that what solves the conflict is the death of Christ on the cross. However, it is not consistent with the evidence to simply go ahead and identify the *ilasthrion* with the sacrifice of Christ at the cross. Certainly, Christ's sacrifice is instrumental in his being the *ilasthrion*, as is seen in the phrase "in his blood," but that does not equate the two things. If it is accepted that the *ilasthrion* is to be identified with the Old Testament mercy seat, as I and others¹⁰⁸ have suggested and argued in this chapter, the next step necessarily is to go into the Old Testament and see what this mercy seat signifies so that we can start to form a theory about to what aspect of Christ ministry Paul is alluding in Rom 3:25.

¹⁰⁸ See also: Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 232. Talbert, *Romans*, 115. Jewett, *Romans*, 285. Schreiner, *Romans*, 194.

CHAPTER 3

THE MERCY SEAT IN ITS OLD TESTAMENT CONTEXT

The Use of יִלְאֶשְׁרִיֹן in the LXX

While יִלְאֶשְׁרִיֹן in the NT is very rare with only two occurrences, it is used 27 times in 20 verses in the LXX. All through the Pentateuch (Ex 25:17-22; 31:17; 32:12; 37: 6,8,9; Lev 16:2,13,14,15; Num 7:89), it is a translation of the Hebrew טָרַף, פָּקַד , which is derived from the root רָפַק . There appears to be a conflict about whether its primary meaning is derived from the qal ‘to cover,’ or the piel meaning ‘to atone.’¹ Martin Noth is one proponent of the thesis that the simple meaning of cover is to be preferred.² However, the translation that was chosen in the LXX, יִלְאֶשְׁרִיֹן (exilasmoj once in 1 Chr 28:11), is derived from יִלְאֶשְׁרִיֹן, which is akin to the piel meaning of רָפַק . It is therefore likely that the טָרַף, פָּקַד was generally understood in terms of its reconciliatory function, even though its obvious function was to cover the Ark. There is no reason however to force an either/or decision, when the material function is obvious and does not in the least interfere with the well attested symbolic

¹ J. Philip Hyatt, *Exodus*, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1971), 267.

² Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1962), 205.

function.³ There is no reason why the symbolic meaning cannot be reflected in its material function.

The Use of **Tr , POK;** in the Old Testament

tr , POK; refers to the mercy seat in all OT occurrences. It is usually translated *lathrion* in the LXX, but there are a few exceptions, (Ex 26:34, 30:6; 37:7; 37:9; 39:35; 40:20; 1 Chr 28:11) almost all of which are due to omissions or different parent texts in the LXX.⁴ The only time the mercy seat is actually translated with another

³ Jon L Dybdahl, *Exodus: God Creates a People*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier, vol. 2 (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1994), 228.

⁴ In Ex 26:34, the LXX differs notably from the Masoretic text. Instead of “And you shall put (! τn) the mercy seat (**tr , POK;**) on the ark of the testimony,” it says “you shall cover up (*katakalu, yeij*) by means of the veil (*katapeta, smati*) the ark...” according to John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus*, Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series, vol. 30 (Atlanta, GE: Scholars Press, 1990), 429. The fact that the LXX changes both, the noun and the verb of the sentence is evidence that this is not due to an error. The Palestinian Targum actually has **tkrP** (veil) instead of **trPK**, but Wevers does not believe that this was the parent text for the LXX. The exact reasons for this irregularity may be unknown, but it is quite certain that the LXX means what it says and that *katapeta, smati* was not considered to be a translation of **tr , POK;**. The LXX translation of Exodus 30:6 as well does not conform to the Masoretic text, but instead follows the shorter text of the Samaritan Pentateuch. Wever argues that the parent text of the LXX left out the phrase **tr<POK;h; ynEp.li tdU[eh' !roa] -l [; rv<a]** due to a homoioteleuton. *ibid.*, 491. In Exodus 37:7 (LXX: 38:6), the greater part of the verse “he made them of hammered work, at the two ends of the mercy seat;” is omitted. Only the making of the cherubim from gold is mentioned. Similarly, Exodus 37:9 (LXX: 38:8), is only given in part in the LXX. In Ex 39:35 (LXX: 39:14) as well as in 40:20, the LXX simply omits the mercy seat.

word than *i`lasthrion* in the LXX is found in 1 Chr. 28:11. Here, the term *exilasmoj* is chosen, which is another noun cognate to *i`laskomai* (to have mercy, to bring about reconciliation). Outside of the Pentateuch, the *tr, POK;* is only mentioned once directly, in 1 Chr 28:11. Nevertheless, this one text is a testament to the prominence it held in the OT Sanctuary. The most holy place is called *tr<POK;h;* *tybeW*, the room of the mercy seat, showing that the mercy seat was not merely considered an addition to the ark, but had importance in its own right.

The first mention of the *tr, POK;* is made in Exodus 25:17 in the instruction for the erection of the desert sanctuary. Its immediate functions were to be a cover to the Ark of the Covenant (25:21; 26:34) and to be the place where God would meet with Moses and commune with him in order to give him the commandments for the children of Israel (25:22). The instructions concerning the building of the ark and the mercy seat in Exodus 25 are later mirrored in the recounting of the building process in Exodus 37. In between we find a few mentions in reference to position (26:34; 30:6) and in lists of all the items in the Tabernacle (31:7; 35:12).

Later in the Pentateuch, the mercy seat plays a central role in the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16, which constitutes its only regular ritual function. In Numbers 7:89, God is said to speak to Moses from above the mercy seat in fulfillment of Exodus 25:22. Thus, the next task, studying the function the mercy seat as given in the OT, can now be approached.

The Functions of the Mercy Seat

In order to describe the different functions of the mercy seat in the most convenient manner, I have chosen to follow the order of their appearance. First, the mercy seat appears as the cover of the Ark of the Covenant, followed by it being the locus of divine revelation, and finally its role in the Day of Atonement.

The Mercy Seat as a Cover of the Ark of the Covenant

In Exodus 25:21, Moses is commanded to put the mercy seat above the ark. This is immediately followed by the order to put the testimony that God was going to give Moses into the ark. The testimony (תְּוִדָּה [עֵ) are the two tables with the ten commandments (Ex 31:18; 32:15; 34:29) given to Moses on Sinai. The Ark is called the Ark of the Testimony a number of times especially in Exodus and Numbers (Ex 25:22; 26:33-24; 30:6, 26; 31:7; 39:35; 40:3, 5, 21; Num 4:5; 7:89). The testimony is so important that the most holy place is at times called the tent of the testimony (Num 9:15; 17:7, 8; 18:2; 2 Chr 24:6). It is therefore to be expected that the function and meaning of the Ark of the Testimony are dependent on its function as a container for the law.⁵

⁵ Two more items were associated with the ark and the testimony: the pot of manna (Ex 16:34) and Aaron's blossoming rod (Num 17:10). Both items were to be kept before the testimony, which could mean that they were kept in the holy place, as things like the holy incense (Ex 30:36), or the altar of incense (Ex 40:5). However, the other staves of the elders of Israel (Num 17:1-11) were also kept "before the testimony" (17:4), but this place is further described as the place where God would meet Moses. Furthermore, Moses lays out the rods "before the LORD" (17:7) and brings them out "from before the LORD unto all the children of Israel." Later God commands Moses to bring Aaron's rod "again before the testimony" (17:10), which strongly implies that it is the same place where the twelve rods were kept before. There is no explicit indication in Exodus 16:32-36 or in Numbers 17:1-11 that the manna or the rod were actually placed

The law that was written on the stone tables is also called the “words of the covenant” (Ex 34:28). The covenant includes more than just the Ten Commandments (Ex 34:27),⁶ but they were clearly at its core and its most prominent representation. From this stems the more frequent designation: The Ark of the Covenant (e.g.: Num 10:33; 14:44; De 10:8; 31:9, 25, 26; Jos 3:6, 8, 11, 14, 17). It almost goes without saying that the covenant that described the relationship between God and his people, and the people among themselves, is dependent on the prior salvation of Israel from Egyptian bondage, as the preamble in Ex 20:1-2 describes. “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Since God has helped Israel from nothing to everything they now enjoy, his blessings are going to be contingent on Israel’s obedience to the covenant. This does not imply that Israel’s performance can solicit divine favor. Everything Israel receives from God is comes out of his love and grace and faithfulness toward the covenant he has made with their fathers out of love and grace (Deut 4:29-40), but the relationship must remain reciprocal in order to be meaningful.⁷ As Randall C. Bailey puts it: “The Decalogue (created by Yahweh) and the “Ark” (created by the people)

in the ark itself. 1 Kings 8:9 and 2 Chronicles 5:10 may corroborate this observation, as it says that there was nothing in the ark except the stone tablets Moses put there at Horeb. Hebrews 9:4 on the other hand, claims that the golden pot with the manna and Aaron’s rod were kept in the Ark as well. This discrepancy has been observed by many commentators. For a possible solution, see Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 377–78. For the details, see Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia - a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1989), 236–37.

⁶ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 735.

⁷ John C. Peckham, "The Concept of Divine Love in the Context of the God-World Relationship" (Dissertation, Andrews University, 2012), 639.

symbolized the contributions made by each party to the covenant.”⁸ Thus, the love of God, while being unconditional in one sense is manifested in different ways according to the decisions made by humans. This type of divine-human relationship can be observed throughout the history of Israel and it is spelled out distinctly in Deuteronomy 28.

The law within the covenant is also protected by the mercy seat. It seems to be more than a coincidence that the sin which is transferred on the mercy seat, where also the cleansing blood is applied, would otherwise taint the commandment itself. The mercy seat thereby becomes a means by which God maintains his covenant promises and the consistency of his character at the same time. It becomes the symbol of his mercy that triumphs over sin and its consequences. Similarly, Ellen White wrote about the connection of the law and the mercy seat in the Ark of the Covenant that it represents “the union of justice and mercy in the plan of human redemption.”⁹

The Cherubim

Because of their optical prominence as the most memorable feature of the ark as a whole, the cherubim should be considered as having meaning for the symbolic significance of the ark.

Cherubim seem to be a class of angelic beings and are mentioned by name numerous times in the Old Testament. Their first appearance is in Gen 3:24 as guardians

⁸ Randall C. Bailey, *Exodus*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 2007), 286. In the later section on the role of the mercy seat in the Day of Atonement ritual, we will see how the sins of the people endanger the covenant and how God reacts to this problem.

⁹ Ellen White, *Manuscript Releases Vol. 9: Nos. 664-770* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen White Estate, 1981), 419.

of Eden. They are not mentioned again until Ex 25:18, in the instructions for the building of the mercy seat (Ex 25:18-22; 37:7-9). Cherubim also decorate a part of the tent as is mentioned in Ex 26:1, 31; 36:8, 35. There are different descriptions of Cherubim, ascribing different features to them.¹⁰ The cherubim on the mercy seat could have been single faced, as their faces were to point to each other (Ex 25:20), humanoid, and two-winged beings – similar to popular modern pictures of the ark today – or they could have looked different and foreign to us.

But what is the function of the cherubim? The cherubim, particularly those on the mercy seat, are often referred to as the place above which God is enthroned (בִּוְיָ) (1

¹⁰ In the construction of the temple of Solomon, two Cherubim are built from olive wood and covered in gold (1 Kgs 6:23-28 2 Chr 3:10-14). They were made to fill the most holy place from one side to the other and to overshadow the ark (1 Kgs 8:6-7; 2 Chr 5:7-8). These two cherubim apparently were understood to be on a chariot or form a chariot of some kind (1 Chr 28:18). Cherubim are also on the walls and doors of the sanctuary (1 Ki 6:29; 1 Ki 6:32; 2 Chr 3:7). They generally are important motifs in the description of all sanctuaries, and even the temple in Ezekiel's vision (Ezek 41:18, 20, 25) has its walls decorated with cherubim. Ezekiel incidentally mentions cherubim more often than any other book. The physical features of the cherubim are not always described the same. Exodus 25:20 seems to imply that their faces are one directional (meaning they have one each) and while 1 Kings 6:24 indicates that the great cherubim in the temple (probably modeled after those on the mercy seat) have two wings each, they are described vastly different in Ezekiel 10. Here the Cherubim have four wings, four faces, and their bodies as well as the wheels associated with them are covered in eyes. In Ezekiel 41:18 interestingly the cherubim are depicted with only two faces instead of four (perhaps because of the two-dimensional medium they were depicted on). Another description of a cherubim, this time a single individual, is provided in Ezekiel 28:12, in the lamentation of about the king of Tyre. The focus lies on the jewelry, not on physical features, and the overall impression is that of great beauty and majesty. It is apparent that the outward appearance of the beings called cherubim is varied and is perhaps not decisive for establishing their identity.

Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Ki 19:15; 1 Chr 13:6; Ps 80:2; 99:1; Isa 37:16).¹¹ In a few instances, God not only sits above the cherubim, but is said to ride (בִּכְרֹ) on them (2 Sam 22:11; Ps 18:11), which is probably connected to the chariot that is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 28:18.¹² In direct reference to the ark, the Cherubim are often said to cover (שָׁכַס) it with their wings (Ex 25:20; 37:91; Ki 8:7; 1 Chr 28:18; 2 Chr 5:8). This concept is also found in Ezekiel 28:16, 18, where the king of Tyre is called the “anointed cherub who covers,” and “covering cherub.” Ezekiel does not directly refer to God as sitting above the cherubim. This position is clearly implied however, in Ezekiel 1:22-27; 9:3; 10; 11:22.

This survey of the texts mentioning cherubim suggests that the presence of the cherubim on the mercy seat shows that it was understood as connected to and positioned below the throne of God. Verses like 1 Chronicles 28:2; Psalms 99:5; 132:7; Lamentations 2:1 may even give it a more concrete function as the footstool to God’s throne¹³ – similar to the one mentioned in 2 Chronicles 9:18 below the throne of Solomon. Footstools had a certain prominence in ancient middle eastern throne designs, especially in cultic context,

¹¹ Some of the texts in which God is said to be enthroned above the cherubim specifically mention this in connection to the ark (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 1 Chr 13:6; Eze 9:3). This leads me to believe that those texts must be newer than the instructions for placing cherubim on the ark. Contra Hyatt, *Exodus*, 258., John I Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 358., et al, who assume that Exodus 25 was written by P in the 6th and 5th century, and projects Solomon’s temple back on the desert sanctuary.

¹² The phrase ~ybi rUK .h; hb 'K ' r>M, h is sometimes translated “the chariot of the cherubim,” but since the chariots have an article, this cannot be a construct, and should instead be treated as an opposition. The cherubim constitute the chariot.

¹³ Bailey, *Exodus*, 287.

as Randall C. Bailey points out: "the ancient Near Eastern practice of placing treaty documents at the feet of the god in the temple indicates that the ark was thought of as Yahweh's footstool (Ps 99:5; 132:7; Lam 2:1) implying that Yahweh resided above it."¹⁴ Thus, extra biblical as well as inner biblical evidence leads to the conclusion, that the ark as a whole was understood as the footstool below the throne of the Lord, indicated by the presence of the cherubim as well as the contents of the Ark of the Covenant.

While the presence of the cherubim indicates the relation of the ark to the throne of God as the seat of God's rule among his people, they also fulfill a different role. As they stand below the throne, they remind the beholder of the power and splendor of the one sitting on the throne without making an image of God himself. The power and splendor of the servants reflects on the master, even if he is not seen. For similar reasons, Solomon included statues of lions in his throne – to show that Solomon commanded the strength of lions, though only figuratively (1 Kgs 10:19).

The throne of God is at the seat and center of his government.¹⁵ Often when prophets were in vision, God appeared to them sitting on a throne. Some examples are Isaiah 6:1; Ezekiel 1:26; Daniel 7:9; Revelation 4-5. A throne, like a crown, is the sign of royalty, literally the seat of power in a kingdom. The throne is also the seat of the highest court in the kingdom, and human kings were encouraged to fulfill their duties as judges faithfully and just. Proverbs 16:12 says that "it is an abomination for kings to commit

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Gane, *Cult and Character*, 319. For a very detailed treatment of the throne of God motif in the Old Testament, see Daegeug Nam, "The "Throne of God" Motif in the Hebrew Bible" (Dissertation, Andrews University, 1989).

wickedness, for a throne is established on righteousness.” See as well Proverbs 20:28; 25:5; 29:14.¹⁶

God’s throne is often mentioned in connection with an emphasis on the range and security of God’s rule (Ps 45:6; 47:8; 93:2; 103:19), but it is also known for righteous judgment (Ps 9:4, 7; 11:4-6; 89:14; 97:2). In God, kingdom and judgment are united.¹⁷ Righteousness however, for a judge means to acquit the innocent and to punish the guilty.¹⁸ This is, what God himself set as a standard for the judges of Israel (Lev 19:15; Deut 16:18-20; 25:1-2), and in some instances, said it about himself (Exod 23:7). Here, as I will lay out later, lies the reason why God’s righteousness is questioned with regard to his not punishing sins in Romans 3:25.

The Mercy Seat as a Place of Divine Revelation

In Exodus 25:22, God says to Moses about the mercy seat: “And there I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, 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.”

¹⁶ An interesting story involving the throne of the king and right judgment is found in 2 Sam 14:9. Here, the supposed widow of Tekoa argues with King David about whether or not he should grant pardon to one of her imaginary sons, who had killed the other and was now threatened with capital punishment. In order to overcome David’s reluctance, she offers to bear the guilt of the merciful judgment, so that “the king and his throne be guiltless,” which in turn implies that the acquittal of a guilty person was considered to incur guilt on the judge. For more detail on this and other stories illustrating this principle, see Gane, *Cult and Character*, 338.

¹⁷ Nam, "The "Throne of God" Motif in the Hebrew Bible," 449.

¹⁸ Stott, *Romans*, 112.

Moses enjoyed a very deep and special relationship with God. Unlike even his siblings, he was allowed to speak to God like with a friend, face to face (Ex 33:11). Moses was allowed to come into the most holy place often, while Aaron and his successors were only allowed once a year and with special preparations. (Lev 16:2) Thus, while the mercy seat is a place of revelation, it is also a hidden place that is not revealed to any but a very few persons. This hidden revelation of God is reflected in many instances in the Pentateuch: God reveals himself to Moses on Sinai, but only his “back” may be seen (Ex 33:18-23). God reveals himself to the people of Israel at Sinai, but he hides in darkness and clouds (Ex 19:9). God indicates his presence with a pillar of cloud or fire, but while he is in it, no one is allowed to approach his actual presence. He cannot be seen. The Ark of the Covenant, the most beautiful and holy object in the sanctuary, paradoxically was never seen by most of the people. Stuart notices this phenomenon and explains it as a reminder for Israel to come to God with faith, and not according to what can be seen.¹⁹ Only later, in the New Testament, would God live openly among his people in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ therefore is the visible form of the revelation that was hidden in the most holy place. Even in Jesus however, divinity was hidden. He came as a mortal, not even a spectacular mortal, but showed the father to his disciples (John 14:9) as accurately and completely as they were able to bear. To those who came after the disciples, the covenant promises are to be believed by faith, not by sight (Heb 11:1). Jesus to the believer after 31 AD is as invisible as the ark was to the people of Israel. While revelation has increased,²⁰ it is as Paul says:

¹⁹ Stuart, *Exodus*, 593.

²⁰ Revelation has increased greatly with the first advent of Christ. One area in which revelation has increased very clearly in the New Testament is the revelation of

“now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known” (1 Co 13:12).

The content of God’s revelation from between the cherubim is “all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel” (Ex 25:22) Making laws, in biblical times, was the prerogative of the king. While other nations had “god-kings” pretending to rule instead of a god, Israel was a true theocracy with God himself making the laws. Since God exercised this kingly prerogative from the mercy seat, this again shows that it is plausible to speak of it as the seat of his government in Israel. While, the mercy seat is not to be viewed as the throne of God itself, as its footstool, it stands right in front of it. Thus, the priest, standing before the Ark, would also stand before the throne of God. With this exploration of the mercy seat and its functions, it is now time to turn our attention to Leviticus 16 and the Day of Atonement.

The Role of the Mercy Seat in the Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement Ritual and the Daily Sacrifices

In Leviticus 16 the mercy seat has its only appearance in a recurring ritual function. Moses is told by the LORD that his brother Aaron, the high priest, would not enjoy unlimited access to the most holy place. Instead he was to come once a year, on one specific

Christ as the antitypical priest in the book of Hebrews. The author of Hebrews describes, beginning in Hebrews 3, but most notably in chapters 7-10:22, how Christ has superseded the Levitical priesthood and how his sacrifice has superseded the sacrifices of the earthly sanctuary. Christ as a priest is also prominent in the book of Revelation. It would most certainly be profitable to connect what Hebrews says about the Christ’s role as the high priest with what Paul indicates about a possible aspect of Christ ministry that is symbolized by the mercy seat, but this endeavor does not fit within the topical constraints of this thesis.

day, the tenth day of the seventh month (16:29; 23:27-28) and only with extensive ritual preparation.

Roy Gane describes the rituals of the Day of Atonement in great detail.²¹ For the purpose of this thesis, a condensed description will suffice. The Day of Atonement is the day on which the “ritual impurities and moral faults of the Israelites”²² are purged from the sanctuary. As God is enthroned above the mercy seat, the sanctuary is his earthly administrative center and represents his “authority, character, and reputation for justice, upon which his rule is founded.”²³ Throughout the year, whenever he accepted the sacrifice of an Israelite, he did not exact the punishment that was due according to the guilt the sinner had incurred upon himself, but he forgave nevertheless. Thus, while God accepts the sacrifice as a token of repentance and trust, he takes upon himself the judicial responsibility for acquitting a sinner in exchange for basically nothing.²⁴ On the Day of Atonement, this judicial responsibility is purged, which signifies that his decisions as a judge are vindicated. With the vindication of God’s merciful forgiveness, the people who have put their trust into him and have followed the rituals prescribed for personal purification also experience the vindication and finalization of their redemption.²⁵

The fact that the Day of Atonement is at the same time supposed to be a day of fasting, of ceasing from work and of self-investigation (Lev 23:27-32), shows that the

²¹ Roy E. Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 271–77. For a more in depth treatment of the Day of Atonement see Gane, *Cult and Character*.

²² *Ibid.*, 241.

²³ *Ibid.*, 319.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 321.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 322.

previously granted forgiveness in the regular sacrifices needs to be finalized from the point of view of the believer. Thus the Old Testament Sanctuary services were designed as a two stage system from both the perspective of God and of the believer.

Special importance for the purpose of this thesis bears the fact that these judicial responsibilities remain on the symbol for God's divine administration even after a sacrifice is offered in the daily sanctuary services. Thus, in an antitypical reading, God's divine rule is in question because his grace does not seem to be in agreement with one of the aspects of his character, specifically the aspect of justice within his righteousness. While it can be said that compassion and mercy are part of God's righteousness as well, these cannot be played against each other but must all work together without contradiction. Wherever a righteous God is merciful, he is as well just, and wherever he is just, he is in equal measure merciful.

The final ritual of the Day of Atonement is the sending away of the goat for the Azazel. The meaning of this ritual is much disputed,²⁶ but I agree with Gane that it does not constitute a sacrifice, but rather is an elimination ritual, and that the Azazel is not another type of Christ, but rather stands for some kind of demon.

The Day of Atonement ritual also shows the incompatibility of impurity and holiness.²⁷ Both cannot coexist infinitely and the removal of impurity from God's holy presence thereby becomes a vindication of his character. Although the term theodicy is usually used to describe an effort to vindicate God in the face of evil, I believe it can be

²⁶ See Gane's chapter on in *Cult and Character*, 242–66.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 327.

used appropriately here to describe his own effort to justify his merciful dealings with sin and the sinner.

The Day of Atonement in Adventist Typological Interpretation

Typology, as defined by Richard M. Davidson, consists of “divinely-designed prefigurations (in the form of persons/events/institutions) that point forward to their antitypical fulfillment in Christ and gospel realities brought about by Christ.”²⁸ The sanctuary on earth, in which the Day of Atonement took place, is modelled after the heavenly prototype in which the events typified in the earthly sanctuary find their fulfillment (Exo 25:40).²⁹ Since the events typified in the sanctuary services, for example the crucifixion of Christ, took place in the future from the point of view of the Old Testament believer, typology can be said to have a prophetic element.³⁰ This prophetic element is not imagined backward from the time of fulfillment into the ritual, but is intended at the time the type is established. An example for a prophetic interpretation of a type before its fulfillment is Isaiah 53:5-7, where the suffering servant is likened to a lamb that is “pierced for our transgression,” showing that the prophet expected an antitypical fulfillment of the sacrifices commanded in Leviticus.

Beginning in the early 19th century, Daniel 8:14 was similarly interpreted to give a prophetic interpretation on a type found in the sanctuary. As P. Gerard Damsteegt

²⁸ Richard M. Davidson, "Sanctuary Typology," in *Daniel & Revelation Committee Series*, vol. 7, *Symposium on Revelation - Book I*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 99.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

describes in some detail, William Miller and others interpreted the phrase “for 2300 evenings and mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored,” as hearkening back to the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16.³¹ Initially it was thought that the end of this period would bring the second coming of Christ, but as the calculated date, October 22, 1844³² passed by without it coming to pass, some Millerite believers took a second look and identified the event described in Daniel 8:14 with an antitypical vindication of the divine government and its merciful approach to sin. This event would have taken place in heaven, in the original sanctuary, and not on earth. The theological meaning of the typical Day of Atonement, as was summarized in the previous section (the vindication of God’s judgments and the finalization of the salvation of the believers), was then transferred to the antitypical Day of Atonement in heaven and thus was born the doctrine of the investigative pre-advent judgement of the believers.³³ The significance of the Day of Atonement however should not be viewed as being limited to its antitypical fulfillment beginning in 1844. The question

³¹ For an in depth discussion of the connection between Daniel 8:14 and the Day of Atonement, I recommend Martin Pröbstle, "Truth and Terror: A Text Oriented Analysis of Daniel 8:9-14" (Dissertation, Andrews University, 2006), 489–96. See also Jacques B. Doukhan, *Daniel: The Vision of the End* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987), 36–41. Niels-Erik Andreasen, "Translation of Nisdaq/Katharisthesetai in Daniel 8:14," in *Daniel & Revelation Committee Series*, vol. 2, *Symposium on Daniel*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1986)

³² For the establishment of this date as the end date of the 2300 year prophecy, see William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, 7 vols., Daniel & Revelation Committee Series, vol. 1 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992). Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel: Wisdom and Dreams of a Jewish Prince in Exile* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000).

³³ For a discussion on the development of this doctrine in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, see Frank B. Holbrook, ed., *Doctrine of the Sanctuary: A Historical Survey*, Daniel & Revelation Committee Series, vol. 5 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1989).

is not just for what could be the means of the cleansing (the blood of Christ), but also what might be the place where impurity lingers until then. If the symbolic functions of the *i`lasthrion* are to be fulfilled in Christ, then this question is answered. Christ is the sacrifice, killed for our sin. Christ is the priest, carrying it into the sanctuary, and Christ is the mercy seat, where sin is kept until it is cleansed.

It is important for the purpose of this thesis to keep in mind that according to this reading of the prophecy of Daniel 8:14, to which I ascribe, from Paul's perspective in the first century A.D., the antitypical Day of Atonement is in the future, at the end of the 2300 days in the year 1844. If Paul believes the antitypical Day of Atonement to have taken place in the first century, this would necessitate an adjustment of the standard Adventist view on these matters. However, as I will try to show in the following sections, the functions of the mercy seat were not exclusively centered in the Day of Atonement. It remains to be investigated in the third chapter of this thesis what the *i`lasthrion* might then play in Paul's understanding of the antitypical Day of Atonement.

Conclusion

The mercy seat, together with the rest of the Ark of Covenant, is a figurative representation of the foundations of the government of God. As such, it is intimately connected to the throne of God that is above it, for the throne of God is a representation of his rule. It is then interesting to observe, especially in the context of Romans 3:25, that the throne of God is frequently connected to the righteousness of God as a royal judge (Ps 89:14; Isa 16:5), just as the throne of the earthly king is connected to his qualities as a judge

(Pro 16:12. See also Pro 20:8; 25:5; 29:14).³⁴ In being a part of the foundation of God's government, the mercy seat serves as a repository for the "judicial responsibilities" God takes on himself by acquitting the sinner. The same can be said about the rest of the sanctuary, as it is cleansed as a whole represented by the cleansing of the two altars and the mercy seat. However, the mercy seat is without doubt the most prominent place of God's revelation and representation.

When Paul calls Christ the *ἱλῆσθριον* that was revealed to demonstrate the righteousness of God, which was in question due to his apparently unjustified³⁵ tolerance toward sin, he thereby opens a door to an enhanced understanding of what Christ's ministry constitutes. When Christ died, he was revealed as the sacrifice of the Old Testament sanctuary services, but perhaps his responsibility did not end there. In Romans 3:25, Paul calls Christ a *ἱλῆσθριον*. In this chapter, it was my aim to fill this term with the content it has in the Old Testament. One of the functions of the *ἱλῆσθριον* was to be the place where the impurities of the people of Israel were gathered during the year and cleansed from the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. The contribution of Romans 3:25, to the system of sanctuary thought then is that Christ furthermore continues to bear our sins and carries them even into the very center of God's divine government, where they can

³⁴ While righteousness cannot be reduced to justice, it seems that in the context of Romans 3:25, since it is in question due to God's merciful conduct toward the sinners in times past, God's justice is the aspect of God's righteousness that is in the focus of the demonstration. God's righteousness is not merely defined by his justice, but righteousness contains justice. If the justice of God ever were to fail, then so would his righteousness.

³⁵ Even though Paul is describing a situation in which the righteousness of God was not apparent to all due to his forbearance toward sin, he clearly does not mean to say that God was ever or will ever be unrighteous in character or in deed.

safely be stored until the final cleansing is accomplished. The implications of this thought need to be assessed in further discussions, but it would appear that Paul shows at least two things in Romans 3:25: (1) when Christ died for our sins, in a sense he just began to bear them for us.³⁶ (2) Christ is not only our representative in being the bearer of our sins, but also of the representative of God's divine government in bearing the judicial responsibilities incurred on it because of the grace shown toward sinners.

³⁶ Christ bearing our sins is expressed in the aorist tense (Heb 9:28; 1 Pe 2:24). The aorist tense can express that a certain action has taken place at one point in the past. In this particular case, Christ has already borne our sins as a sacrifice, which is a unique event and thus fittingly described in the aorist tense. Nevertheless, I would argue that there are more aspects to Christ's ministry involving sin than just his sacrifice, just as the way of sin in the sanctuary does not end with the death of the lamb.

CHAPTER 4

REPRESENTING THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD

Introduction

In his letter to the Romans, Paul describes how Jesus Christ was publicly displayed as *i`lasthrion*, so that he could prove his righteousness, which was called into question because of his merciful conduct toward sins and sinners. This public display was dependent on the death of Christ, mentioned in Rom 3:25 as the reference to his blood. I have argued above that Paul thereby identifies the *i`lasthrion* as another type for Christ in the sanctuary, next to the sacrifice and the priest.

In the Old Testament, God commanded Moses to make the *i`lasthrion* as a cover for the Ark of the Covenant, in which the words of the Covenant, the Ten Commandments were kept. Furthermore, the *i`lasthrion* was the place, from above which God would meet Moses, commune with him, and give him the laws for the people of Israel. Lastly, the *i`lasthrion* was cleansed from the sins and transgressions and impurities of the people of Israel once every year, which implies that the regular yearly services in the desert sanctuary brought these on it.

This final chapter of the present thesis serves to bring together the strands that were drawn up in the previous sections to form them into a whole. Before that however, I will summarize how salvation works in the context of the great controversy, a concept that some

consider to be the center of Adventist theology. We will then investigate the parallels between Christ and the *imago dei* in regard to the role this image plays in the overall concept of atonement.

Salvation and the Great Controversy

An excellent overview of Adventist systematic theology, including the issues of salvation and the great controversy has been created by Norman Gulley in his *Systematic Theology: Creation, Christ, Salvation*.³⁷ The precursor for salvation is sin. The provision of salvation is a reaction to sin, but sin did not surprise God so that he would only then have come up with a plan to deal with it (Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:18-20). God is presented in Scripture as omniscient in regard to the future for example in Isaiah 46:9-10:

Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.’

If God has foreseen the need for Christ to be a sacrifice, then he must also have foreseen the sin-singularity.³⁸ For Arminian Christians such as myself, this entails that God has not predetermined, but foreknown the free decisions of his creatures to defy him.³⁹

³⁷ Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Creation, Christ, Salvation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 569–652.

³⁸ I have chosen the term singularity, because in natural science it refers to a unique and somewhat odd or unlikely event like the big bang, or the advent of consciousness in the naturalistic worldview.

³⁹ Foreknowing free decisions is a tricky thing. From our perspective it always presupposes that decisions are somehow calculable, and therefore determined. For freedom to be real and God’s foreknowledge to be complete, which I believe are both

When humanity fell, the plan of salvation was set in motion. Its centerpiece was the death of Christ at the cross, where he died as a substitutionary sacrifice bearing the punishment for our sin. The best known verse describing the mission of Christ on earth is John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” In order to fulfill this mission, Christ had to identify with us and our sin. Paul even goes so far to say that he was made “sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor 5:21).⁴⁰ The conclusion of our salvation is the restoration of our existence to how it was before the fall (or even better), which will be accomplished after the end of the millennium in the establishment of the New Jerusalem on earth.⁴¹

Saving us, however, while being its prime objective, is not everything that is accomplished by the plan of salvation. Satan, the serpent of old in Genesis 3 and Revelation 12:9, the tempter in the desert of Matthew 4:1-13 and Luke 4:1-11, the accuser of brethren

biblical doctrines, we have to assume that God has information about the future free decisions of his creature that are not gained by calculation in the way we would imagine it to be, but comes about by means we cannot even speculate about. We cannot know presently how exactly God relates to time, but biblical evidence at least demonstrates that God can interact with creatures like us, which to me presupposes that at least on one level, he experiences time in a manner similar to us. For a discussion of the concepts of time and timelessness in Christian theology, see Fernando Luis Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 10 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983). For an overview of the discussion surrounding the freedom of will, see Roger E. Olson, *Against Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011). And Michael Scott Horton, *For Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

⁴⁰ Other texts showing that Christ did indeed die for our sins in a substitutionary sacrifice are: Romans 5:6-10; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 2:21-24;

⁴¹ For a good overview of Eschatology and the book of Revelation, I recommend Ekkehardt Müller, *Der Erste und der Letzte: Studien zum Buch der Offenbarung* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2011).

in Rev 12:10, is leading a war against God and his eternal government. The foundation of God's government is his law, an expression of his character of love.⁴² War against God's government is therefore not so much a war of weapons as of ideology and this is also the reason why it cannot be won by the sheer strength of omnipotence.⁴³ Not only humanity, but also the onlooking universe needed to have conclusive evidence for the veracity of that which God claims about himself, that He is who He is (Exod 3:14), and worthy of adoration (Rev 4:11). Thus, to provide a universally believable demonstration for this means to end the great controversy. The following sections will try to show how Christ, specifically by being the antitypical *i`lasthrion*, contributes to the conclusion of this conflict.

Parallels between Christ and the *i`lasthrion*

In order to arrive at a plausible theory as to what the role of the *i`lasthrion* in the vindication of God's righteousness is, we need to combine what we know about Christ with what we have found out about the *i`lasthrion* in the previous chapters. The different elements of the Old Testament sanctuary, as was pointed out above, display different aspects of the plan of salvation. Some of the most prominent features of the rituals held in it directly foreshadowed the life and work of Christ. In the next step, I will try to point out

⁴² Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Creation, Christ, Salvation*, 594.

⁴³ This is a crucial concept for theodicy in the classical sense. Evil is to be recognized as such completely and conclusively before it can be destroyed by force. To this end, it often needs to be given free reign for a time. (A very common theme in stories and movies is that the antagonist always rises to the height to his/her power and has an opportunity to present the strongest possible case for his/her actions. It seems that the protagonist cannot win, unless it is shown that the antagonists struggle was wrong from the very beginning. Thus, the way God deals with Satan in the great controversy is actually reflected in the postmodern way of imagining good vs. evil conflict resolutions.)

ways in which the different images complement each other and how the identification of Christ as the *il`lasthrion* contributes to the overall picture of atonement presented in the sanctuary.

There are for example striking contrasts in the Old Testament between the high priest and the sacrifice, both of which typify Christ.⁴⁴ One is killed, the other lives on. One is presented as an offering, the other receives and slaughters the offering. One gives blood, the other applies it (Lev 4). There are however very interesting parallels between them. Both are to be holy, and without blemish (De 17:1; Lev 21:21). Both take upon themselves sin: the lamb by the laying on of hands through the sinner (Lev 4:29),⁴⁵ the priest by the consumption of the sacrificial meat as is specified in Leviticus 6:26; 10:17. The ministry of Christ in the process of atonement is too complex to be explained with one image alone.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 604.

⁴⁵ For an interpretation of the ritual of laying on hands in the sacrifices, see Richard M. Davidson, *Song of the Sanctuary: A Graduate-Level Textbook on the Doctrine of the Sanctuary* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, forthcoming), chapter xxx. This view differs from the view of, for example, Gane, who would rather place an emphasis on the aspect of identification of the sinner with the offering: Gane, *Cult and Character*, 55–57. Jacob Milgrom even goes so far as to rule out the idea that transfer of sin could be in view. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 151. His argument is based on the difference between the regular sacrifices on behalf of individuals and the Azazel rite in Lev 16. He contends that the leaning of one hand on the sacrifice signifies a declaration of ownership instead. While I concur that there is a difference between these rites in the kind of transference of sin, I would argue that Leviticus 10:17 implies that the sin offerings do carry sin and that therefore sin has been transferred from the sinner to the offering. It seems paradoxical that the meat is declared most holy (Lev 6:29), but in light of this thesis so far, the connection of the holy with the sinful in the process of atonement does not seem as surprising anymore. The rejection of the transference theory rests on an article by David P. Wright, "The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and in Hittite Literature," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106, no. 3 (1986): 433–46.

The images employed in the sanctuary service have some things in common, so that they can be identified as belonging to the same person, but they also are unique in some respects, because they each make a contribution to the whole picture. The following section will attempt to show how the mercy seat parallels Christ and how it parallels and is different from the priest and the lamb.

Christ as Revelation of God to His People

Probably the most obvious parallel between Christ and the *throne* is that they both serve as a place for the revelation of God. While this revelation was hidden in the Old Testament, it is now out in the open. Only the high priest was allowed to ever see the Ark of the Covenant – and only once a year. By contrast, Christ was walking the earth for roughly 33 years and was touched by many who would hardly have been admitted even to the outer court of the temple. While the identity of the person signified by the mercy seat was revealed as Christ's, his full nature is hidden still (1 Co 13:12).

In the priest and the sacrifice Jesus is revealed as well, but there are certain limitations in place. The priest must interact with the people on a daily basis and although he was expected to be an example in holiness, he was nevertheless a sinner like everybody else, while it is said about Christ “that he has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15). The purity and glory of God's character and his government cannot be revealed by him, because he does not possess it. In contrast, John writes about Jesus “And the word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” John 1:14). Thus while different elements of the sanctuary and its services were supposed to reveal the character

of God, as Christ did during his time on earth, the mercy seat, where God's special presence dwelt, emphasized His holiness in a way that was not possible for the priest or the lamb.

Christ as a Depository of Sin in Representation of God's Government

As was argued in the previous chapter, the mercy seat was a depository for the sin brought to the sanctuary in the daily services. However, the sacrifice (Lev 4:29) and the priests (Lev 10:17) bear sin too. Why would it be necessary to provide another place for sin? The mercy seat shows more clearly than the sacrifice and priest that it is God himself who bears sin.

A certain degree of permanence and identification is already present in the priests, who eat the meat and thus bear the sin of the people (Lev 6:26; 10:17). However, the priest, does not to the same degree as the mercy seat represent the divine presence itself. That God indeed becomes the carrier of sin is sometimes difficult to see in English translations of the Bible. One example would be Lev 17:11: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls." Here God claims that the blood given for sin has its origin with him, but this could as well be understood as a reference to his ownership of everything. In the Hebrew text however, there is a strong clue in the use of the word *afn* (usually translated as "carry," "lift," or "bear"), when used to describe forgiveness as is done in a number of cases (e.g. Exod 34:7; Num 14:18; Ps 32:5; 85:2; Isa 33:24; Hos 14:2). The forgiver then carries the sins of his people. Thus, any discerning Israelite could have known that his sin is in some way borne by God.⁴⁶ If,

⁴⁶ Gane, *Cult and Character*, 321–22.

however the priest was the primary carrier of sin and object of cleansing in the Day of Atonement, it would be difficult to separate between his need for cleansing as a sinful human, and his need for cleansing as the representative of Christ (Lev 16:6). The contribution of the identification of Christ as the mercy seat to the typology of the sanctuary then is that it identifies the carrier of sin as being close to, even identified with, the divine government.

Dimensions of Sin and the Mercy Seat's Place in Atonement

In order to define the role of Christ as the mercy seat in light of the idea that there is some aspect of sin that still is borne by Christ, one also needs to take a look at the nature of sin.⁴⁷ Sin tarnishes every aspect of human existence and experience, as well as his relationship with God. Thus, it is a complex and multidimensional problem. Probably the most serious aspect of sin is that of rebellion against God and his rule.⁴⁸ The desire to be “free” from God is expressed for example in the incitation of Eve in Gen 3:5 as well as in the description of the fall of the king of Babylon in Isa 14, who can be seen as a type for Lucifer.⁴⁹ The other aspect I will mention here is that of transgression of the law. While sin

⁴⁷ For an overview of the topic, see John M. Fowler, "Sin," in *Commentary Reference Series*, vol. 12, *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000). Other treatments of sin from different points of view are found in Erickson J. Millard, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 513–99.

⁴⁸ Fowler, "Sin," 244.

⁴⁹ While this view has roots going at least back to the church fathers, Isaiah 14 has later been interpreted as just referring to the historical king of Babylon in figurative language and is today mostly seen as a passage with strong ties to middle-eastern mythology. For a good overview of the debate and the historical developments surrounding it, see Jose M. Bertoluci, "The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub

cannot be exhaustively explained as a behavior or pattern of behavior, all sinful behavior constitutes in some way a transgression of the law (1 John 3:4; Jas 2:9).⁵⁰ Without the holy, just, and good law, sin cannot be discerned (Rom 7:7-12). The law in turn is an expression of the character of God.⁵¹ The character of God is holy, righteous and inviolable, and it is the foundation for the relationship between the creator and his creation as well as creation among itself. The bible describes the nature of the relationship between God and his creation using various analogies from human society. God is king, he is judge, he is lover, he is father, and he is creator, to name just a few. In order to keep those relationships intact whilst restoring his broken relationship with humanity, he has instituted the plan of salvation, which includes the ministry of Christ in all its facets. One concern that is expressed in Romans 3:25, is whether God is righteous while showing forbearance to the sins that were committed in the past, and it seems that this concern is alleviated by the public display of Christ as the *ἵλασθριον*, which occurred at the crucifixion. The

in the Context of the Controversy between Good and Evil" (Dissertation, Andrews University, 1985).

⁵⁰ Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, and 3 John*, Revised, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 51 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 153–54. In recent times, scholars have interpreted *anomia* to mean lawlessness rather than transgression of the law. Rather than defining sin as actions that transgress the law, John is saying that all sin amounts to lawlessness as a defiant rebellion against God. While it is therefore difficult to assert that John is here providing a definition for sin as transgression of the law (see Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, The New American Commentary, vol. 38 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 140.), the text still implies that opposition to the law is sin, and by extension that to transgress the law is to sin. That it is sin to transgress the law is also apparent in Romans 3:20 where Paul argues that knowledge of sin comes by means of the law.

⁵¹ Compare for example the following texts: 1 John 4:8 + Matthew 22:37-40. God is love, and the fulfilment of his love is supposed to be an exhibition of that love. Similar parallels can be found regarding holiness (Rom 7:12 + Rev 4:89), goodness (Rom 7:12 + Luke 18:19), and immutability (Matt 5:18 + Mal 3:6).

righteousness of God in Romans 3:25-26 is more than just his justice, but as God is, among other things, a judge, his righteousness necessarily includes his justice. As such, if it were true that he has compromised his law in order to save humanity, he could be accused of unrighteousness. This of course is not the case, but for the audience of the demonstration in Romans 3:25 it was not clear at this junction, how God could take sin upon himself without compromising his character.

Just as the blood of goats and bulls is not really able to cleanse from sin (Heb 10:4), so the typical covering of the Ark of the Covenant is not really able to hold it. Therefore, in making Christ the *i`lasthrion*, which can only happen because of his death, God proves that his method of taking upon himself sin without tarnishing his character is valid and that he has the general judicial right to treat sinners with mercy and forgive sin. While the revelation of Christ as the *i`lasthrion* gives validation to God's claim that he can indeed bear the sin of his people without compromising his character, there still remain questions about the identity of those who can claim that their sin is borne. As has been described in the section about the theological meaning of the Day of Atonement, the judgment regarding the individual believers must be validated before this potential judicial guilt can be finally removed from Christ as the representative of the divine government. In this process, both the believer and God are vindicated, which is one reason why the investigative judgment is good news indeed.

Christ as the i` `lasthrion in the Context of the Antitypical Day of Atonement

As was described in the previous chapter, the antitypical Day of Atonement according to Adventist belief was predicted by Daniel 8:14 to begin in the year 1844. Since the mercy seat has its most prominent appearance in the Day of Atonement, it is legitimate to ask, whether the revelation of Christ as the i` `lasthrion in 31 AD would conflict with this understanding and strengthen the view that the Day of Atonement actually began in the first century, prominently forwarded by Desmond Ford in *Daniel 8:14, The Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment*.⁵² In my view, the publications of the Daniel and Revelation Committee that have been cited a few times throughout this thesis have answered Ford's criticism of Adventist eschatology satisfactorily, but a modification of the sanctuary doctrine cannot be complete without referring to Ford and his ideas.

The role of the i` `lasthrion that has been revealed in Rom 3:25 is not restricted to the time of the antitypical fulfillment of the Day of Atonement since 1844, just as the functionality of the i` `lasthrion in the Old Testament was not restricted to the Day of Atonement. Instead, the mercy seat was active throughout the year as a depository for sin and as an isolation between sin and the law. In like manner, Christ bore the judicial responsibility that God had voluntarily taken upon himself by declaring those who believe in Christ as righteous.⁵³ Paul's reference to the i` `lasthrion is therefore not a reference to the Day of Atonement ritual in itself, but rather to the function it had

⁵² Desmond Ford, *Daniel 8:14, The Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment* (Casselberry, FL: Euangelion Press, 1980), 405–06.

⁵³ See also Gane, *Cult and Character*, 322.

throughout the ritual year. With that said, we can now move on to the conclusion of this thesis.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to determine, (1) that Paul is describing the identification of Christ with the antitypical mercy seat as a proof of the righteousness of God, that (2) this proof was given to address the apparent conflict between God's justice and his merciful treatment of sin and sinners, and (3) what the identification of Christ as the antitypical mercy seat reveals about the nature of his ministry.

My investigation of Romans 3:25-26 has sought to establish a plausible case for the first two points. Given the evidence it seems likely that Paul uses the term *ilasthrion* as a reference to the Old Testament *תר, פֹּכֶי*; and thus makes a typical connection between Jesus and the mercy seat. Furthermore, it seems evident that Paul is viewing the public display of Christ as the *ilasthrion* as a solution to a conflict between God's just character and his merciful approach to sin and sinners, at least in the eyes of the target audience.¹

¹ There is an important difference here between the motivation and the method of salvation. There is no doubt that God has decided to save humanity out of pure love. But secondary to the decision for salvation, God has chosen a method for salvation in which he preserves the consistency of his love for all the universe. In doing so, he has chosen to accept that for a while, his righteousness was questioned by parts of his creation. But this question was put to rest by the different aspects of Christ's ministry, some of which are symbolized in the Old Testament *ilasthrion*.

The mercy seat in the Old Testament is described as the locus of the divine revelation to Israel, as the center of God's divine administration, and as a place on which sin and judicial responsibility are stored during the year, so that it can be cleansed on the Day of Atonement. In all of these functions, the mercy seat parallels different aspects of the mission of Jesus: He is the pinnacle of divine revelation, he bears our guilt, and he bears the judicial responsibility God had incurred on himself by acquitting the guilty.

The public display of Christ as the *ἱλάσθριον* in Romans 3:25 thus validates God's promise to bear the sin of his people without compromising his character. The validation of this promise is at the same time a vindication of the righteousness of God, because the death of Christ has shown that God can, in general, forgive sins and extend mercy to the sinner. I believe it would be profitable to integrate Romans 3:25 into the Adventist theological systems surrounding the antitypical Day of Atonement and the great controversy theme.

It is my hope that showing a connection between these topics and a central passage on righteousness by faith might go a long way to engage non-Adventist Christian scholars on central and unique Adventist beliefs, but also to make the often invisible backbone of Adventist theology more relevant to the average Adventist believer.

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