

those who do His commandments; His praise endures forever.

Prov 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Prov 8:13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way, And the perverted mouth, I hate.

Prov 10:27 The fear of the LORD prolongs life, But the years of the wicked will be shortened.

Prov 14:26 In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, And his children will have refuge.

Prov 14:27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, That one may avoid the snares of death.

Prov 15:16 Better is a little with the fear of the LORD, Than great treasure and turmoil with it.

Prov 16:6 By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, And by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil.

19 Now we know that whatever the Torah says, it speaks to those who are under the Torah, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God;

The NASB begins the verse with "Now . . .," a translation of *δέ, de*, a conjunctive particle that often anticipates a corresponding *μεν, men*, giving the sense of "on the one hand . . . on the other hand." Or, the word can be nearly equivalent to the conjunction "and" or mildly disjunctive, like one use of the English "but." The NASB translates it in a conjunctive sense, tying this verse to the previous context, and most agree with this perspective. As such, the Torah referred to here must be the Scriptures in general, for being tied to the previous context means Paul is considering the quotes as Torah, even though they are from the Prophets and the Writings. This is not uncommon for Paul's day, for the Sages regularly use the term "Torah" to refer to the whole of the Tanach. Paul uses Torah in this way in 1Cor 14:21 as does John in his gospel (10:34; 15:25).

"Under the Torah" is a bad translation of *τοῖς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ*, which literally would be "those in the Torah." "Under the Torah" would be *ὑπὸ νόμον, hupo nomon*, which is found in 6:14, 15. Our expression, "those in the Torah" is found in 2:12 and is contrasted in 2:14 by the negative expression (*τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα*) "those not having the Torah." Thus the expression here, "those who are in the Torah" should be understood to mean "those who possess the Torah" or "those who know the Torah." Thus, the phrase repeats the premise already given by Paul that the Jews were the first to possess the Torah (Scriptures) and thus those parts which clearly denote the universal sinfulness of man most surely apply to the nation to which God first revealed this truth. Since they were privileged to have the Scriptures first, "so far from imagining themselves excepted from its condemnations of human sinfulness, they ought to accept them as applying first and foremost to themselves." (Cranfield, *Romans*, 1.196)

that every mouth may be closed – Paul's logic is clear at this point, based upon *kal v'chomer*, (light and heavy): if the nation of God's choosing stands condemned by the very Scriptures He gave first to them, then it is certain that all the nations are likewise condemned. Or to say it another way, if the nation who first received the Torah stands guilty before God, certainly those nations to which she must teach the Torah would also be rendered guilty.

The expression of a closed mouth simply means that no valid excuse will be forthcoming when the guilty verdict is rendered. As Calvin puts it, "without saying a word [he] awaits his condemnation."

The word translated "become accountable" is *ὑπόδικος, hupodikos*, and is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures. The word in its non-biblical usage denotes one who has offended the law and therefore is liable to prosecution and punishment. Associated with this meaning is that of the injured party having his "day in court" and receiving recompense from the offending

party. NASB "become accountable" probably says too little, as does the NIV and NRSV, "held accountable." NKJV has "become guilty" which is far closer to the mark.

κόσμος, *kosmos*, ("world") here means "mankind," no doubt, and in the context is an inclusive term. Elsewhere, Paul uses this same word to denote Gentiles (11:12, 15).

20 because by the works of the Torah no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Torah comes the knowledge of sin.

The word "because" should most likely be taken to mean "for" (like ὅτι, *hoti*), as indicating that this supports what has just been said. Paul echoes as his support Ps 143:2b, though he does not introduce it with the customary "it is written" or equivalent.

Psalms 143:2 states: "And do not enter into judgment with Your servant, For in Your sight no man living is righteous."

Obviously Paul adds "by the works of the Torah" to the quote. We have had the phrase "work of the Torah" (in the singular) at 2:15, and the plural (as here) will be found again in 3:28, as well as in Gal 2:16 (3 times); 3:2, 5, 10. All of the occurrences of the phrase in Galatians, like here, have the preposition: ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, *ex ergon nomou*, "out from the works of the Torah."

Some have wanted to interpret "works of the Torah" or "work of the Torah" to mean only those deeds done with a view to making oneself righteous, as over against the "works of the Torah" done out of a heart of obedience. But it is never clear that Paul has anything in mind about the motivation for doing what the Torah commands when he uses the phrase "works of the Torah." What is clear, however, is that Paul can never imagine any instance, even with the most righteous motivations, when obedience to the Torah could bring a sinner to right standing before God.

It stands to reason that if the Scriptures teach that "no flesh will be justified in His sight," that this must also include those who, though not perfect, are nonetheless striving to obey the Torah and actually do so, at least a good deal of the time. Thus even those whose lives conform to the Torah cannot, in that obedience, manufacture the righteousness needed to measure up to God's holy standards and be declared without guilt (justified).

Until recently the phrase "works of the Torah" had no extra-biblical counterpart, not being found in the extant rabbinic literature. However, recent publications of the Qumran materials have revealed a similar phrase used by the sect who produced Dead Sea Scrolls. In 4QMMT, section C 25-32 we read:

Remember David, he was a pious man, and indeed he was delivered from many troubles and forgiven.

Now, we have written to you some of the works of the Torah (מִקְצַת מַעֲשֵׂי הַתּוֹרָה, *miktzat ma'asei hatorah*) those which we determined would be beneficial for you and your people, because we have seen [that] you possess insight and knowledge of the Torah. Understand all these things and beseech Him to set your counsel straight and so keep you away from evil thoughts and the counsel of Belial. Then you shall rejoice at the end time when you find the essence of our words to be true. And it will be reckoned to you as righteousness (וְנִחְשְׁבָה לְךָ לְצַדִּיקָה), in that you have done what is right and good before Him, to your own benefit and to that of Israel.³⁵

Regardless of what the interpretation might be of this quote (and of similar language in 4Q174), it seems significant that "works of the Torah" and "reckoned as righteousness" are found in close proximity, language which heretofore has been thought to be exclusively Pauline. We may now speculate that the debate of how one gained righteousness did indeed exist in the 1st Century³⁶ and that there were those, who though recognizing the need for God's mercy, nonetheless felt that their association within the people-group of Israel *as they defined Israel* was

the all-important factor in having a righteous status before God. For the Qumran sect, their entrance requirements (their particular *halachah* which distinguished them from other sects) were the “works of the Torah” necessary to become part of the “*yachad*” (unity, society, or the true expression of Israel) and thus to be reckoned as righteous.

However, for Paul, people-group status was not the basis for right standing before God, but rather Messiah-status, being “in Messiah” was the requirement. This position, of course, struck at the very heart of what the Sages had defined as “righteous.”

for through the Torah [comes] the knowledge of sin – For the person who has not yet come to faith and therefore stands guilty before God, the Torah, rather than being a means of growing in righteousness, points out sin and reveals (if the Spirit is willing to open the eyes) the utter sinfulness of the soul. Apart from faith the Torah is not the remedy to the sin problem but merely the magnifying glass by which the malady is known.

We now come to 3:21-26, a paragraph which is not only the heart of this particular section of Romans (1:18-4:25) but is perhaps also the heart of the entire teaching section of the epistle (1:16b-15:13). Having noted how 3:21-26 has a distinct literary style and unity, Cranfield remarks that its content is what sets it apart as central:

It stands out much more of course by virtue of its content; for it proclaims the fact that the one decisive, once for all, redemptive act of God, the revelation both of the righteousness which is from God and also of the wrath of God against human sin, the once for all revelation which is the basis of the continuing revelation of the righteousness (1:17) and of the wrath (1:18) of God in the preaching of the gospel, has now taken place. It shows that the heart of the gospel preached by Paul is a series of events in the past (not just the crucifixion of Christ—for the Cross by itself would have been no saving act of God—but the crucifixion together with the resurrection and exaltation of the Crucified) a series of events which is the Event of history, an act which as the decisive act of God is altogether effective and irreversible.³⁷

21 But now apart from the Torah *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Torah and the Prophets,

“But now” (*νυνὶ δέ, nuni de*) can be understood temporally, as indicating the present as opposed to the past, or logically, as indicating a conclusion to a given line of argumentation. It seems most likely that here the temporal sense must be in view, in that Paul intends to mark the appearance of the Messiah as the decisive and (relatively speaking) present-day event which in every way is the means by which God intends to declare sinners righteous.

This method of declaring sinners righteous (for so we should understand the phrase “righteousness of God,” as in 1:18) is now fully revealed, a salvation which was witnessed by the Torah and the Prophets. Thus, faith in the Messiah has always been the means by which God declares a sinner just, but it is in the present day (from Paul’s perspective) that the Messiah Himself has been fully revealed.

This method of salvation has always been God’s method of righteousness, having been spoken of before the Messianic event by the Torah and Prophets, and now being realized in the appearance of Yeshua and the teaching of His apostles. This method of declaring a person righteous has always been “apart from the Torah” (*χωρὶς νόμου, choris nomou*), but the very focal point of it, i.e., Yeshua, was only prophesied before—now He has come and in His coming has revealed the fulness of God’s way of salvation.

Those who might want to understand this verse as teaching that Paul regarded the Torah as no longer valuable or necessary since the Gospel has come, must surely twist the words as we find them, for Paul himself recognizes that the Tanach (Torah and Prophets) taught the same

message of salvation by faith—not a message which was contrary to Messiah and thus needed to be abandoned at His arrival. As Cranfield so aptly puts it:

To appeal to these words as evidence that Paul regarded the law as superseded and set aside by the gospel as something now out of date and irrelevant is surely perverse.³⁸

The addition of the phrase “being witnessed by the Torah and the Prophets” is significant, for it substantiates not only the teaching that the gospel is contiguous with the Tanach, but also that the Tanach is properly understood as witness to this righteousness which is by faith alone, that is, to the gospel which is centered in the person and work of Yeshua. Had Paul believed that the Tanach was contrary to the gospel as it is in Yeshua, he most certainly could not have appealed to it as he does time and time again to substantiate the gospel message, nor would he have, in this verse, named it as corroborating witness to the righteousness of God which is apart from the Torah, that is, apart from the “works of the Torah.”

22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Yeshua Messiah for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;³⁹

Here, the opening of the verse with δὲ, *de* (“but, and”) indicates a closer definition of what has just been discussed. Paul uses the term in the same way in 9:39; 1Cor 2:6; Gal 2:2; Phil 2:8. The righteousness of God of which Paul is speaking is through faith in the Messiah and is available to all who believe.

faith in Yeshua Messiah – διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *dia pisteos Iesou Christou*, the genitive indicating the object of the faith (thus the English “in” is added to give the proper sense but is not represented by an equivalent Greek ἐν, *en*). This is the first time in the epistle that Paul explicitly names Yeshua as the object of saving faith, but he does so while having just, in the same breath, argued that the Torah and the Prophets witnessed this means of salvation which is apart from the works of the Torah. Thus, the Tanach witnesses to Yeshua, and we know that this was the unified teaching of the Apostles and of Yeshua Himself (cf. Lk 24:27).

for there is no distinction – in the same way that all are guilty before God, so there is no distinction in the method of salvation God applies to sinners. There is only one way of salvation, and this is through faith in Yeshua. 10:12, “for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek” makes the same claim. But it is going too far to say that this abolition of distinction between Jew and Greek must necessarily mean that the privileges of national Israel have also been abolished. The utter lack of distinction in this sense is in the means by which God declares a sinner righteous (=the righteousness of God). God does not have one plan of salvation for the Jew and a different one for the non-Jew. As far as right standing before God, it makes absolutely no difference what race or gender a person is, nor their station in life. This, of course, does not negate real distinctions between race, gender, or station in life as to particular issues of life and the attendant responsibilities.

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Perhaps the most important question to be asked initially is how these verses are structured, particularly how v. 24 fits together with vv. 22-23. Specifically we must ask how δικαιούμενοι, *dikaionomenoi* (“being justified”) attaches to what comes before, and who the subject of that participle is. The following options seem apparent:

- 1) that those being justified are the “all” of v. 23, so that the sense is that all are sinners (v. 23) but all are being justified.

- 2) that those being justified are the "all" of v. 22, i.e., "all who believe," and that v. 23 is a parenthetical statement to explain or give explanation why there is no distinction (because all have equally sinned and are therefore sinners).
- 3) that v. 24 begins a new and independent sentence.

I am inclined to go with option #1, though with a further explanation, that the "all who believe" of v. 22 is the governing idea, and that therefore the "all have sinned" of v. 23 refers specifically (in this case) to those who have believed, proving that among these there is no distinction of race. Thus, v. 24 goes on to show yet another reason why there is no distinction, namely, that all who have commonality in their sinful status, and who share in the singularity of their faith, also share equally the eternal gift of God's righteousness (i.e., the method which God employs in order to declare sinners righteous).

If this interpretation is correct, then v. 23, one of the most often memorized verses of Romans, is generally misunderstood. For it is usually taught as giving substantiation for the universal sinfulness of mankind, but in the context would (in this interpretation) only be speaking of the sinfulness of all who believe.

V. 23, then, emphasizes that all those who have believed and have therefore been given right standing before God, find a commonality in being sinners and having fallen short of God's glory. The past tense (aorist) in the word "have sinned" should not be forced as teaching that those who have come to faith in the Messiah no longer sin. Rather, the aorist is most likely "collective," being viewed as it were from the vantage point of the final judgment day. That the judgment day may well be in Paul's mind is hinted at by "every mouth may be stopped" of v. 19. Thus, the final judgment will reveal that all have sinned.

Secondly, the commonality among all who believe is that they fall short of the glory of God. The word translated "fall short" is from the Greek ὑστερεῖν, *husterein*, which means "be behind," "come too late," "fail to obtain," "lack," "be inferior to," and "fail" or "be wanting." Paul uses the word elsewhere in 1Cor 1:7; 8:8; 12:24; 2Cor 11:5, 9; 12:11; Phil 4:12.

This verse thus teaches that not only all other men, but also all believers still lack this "glory of God" in the sense that the transcendent majesty that we will receive when we see Him (for we will become like Him, cf. 1Jn 3:2) is not yet ours. This is not to deny that there is a radiant glory (in one sense of the word) that emanates from believers through the indwelling Spirit. But it does emphasize that we have not yet received all that we have been promised, and, to use Paul's words, we will be transformed "from glory to glory" (2Cor 3:18) when we are ushered into the world to come. This future glory may be conceived of as a status in which the full glory of God can shine upon us without any diminished effect, so that we may reflect, as it were, the glory of God in all His perfections. It is, therefore, our constant goal to reflect more and more this glory of God without diminishing it in the least.

24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Messiah Yeshua;

If the interpretation above is correct, and v. 23 is a kind of parenthesis, then the basic sentence with which we are dealing is: "But now apart from the Torah the righteousness of God has been manifested, the righteousness of God through faith in Yeshua Messiah for all who believe, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Messiah Yeshua."

We have encountered the term "justified" several times already in Romans (2:13; 3:4, 20), though here it is used for the first time "directly and positively in reference to what is the leading theme of this epistle."⁴⁰ The word itself is cognate with the noun for "righteous" (δικαιος, *dikaïos*) and "righteousness" (δικαιοσύνη, *dikaïosune*) and means "to show justice," "vindicate," "be treated justly" and in the passive "to be acquitted," "be pronounced and treated as righteous." At the heart of the gospel is the fact that God pronounces sinners to be righteous and

treats them accordingly. The difficulty this represents, of course, is that it brings God's justice into question, a difficulty dealt with in v. 26. For the "righteousness of God" (=the method by which God declares a sinner righteous) involves the due payment of sin by the death of His Messiah.

as a gift of His grace (δωρεὰν τῆ αὐτοῦ χάριτι, *dorean te autou chariti*) – The Greek word which lies behind the translation "as a gift" is δωρεά, *dorea* which often in the Lxx translates חֵנָם, *chinam*, "without compensation (=free)," "without cause, undeservedly." Its appearance in the Lxx no doubt influenced its use in the Apostolic writings. Note the following where the Hebrew term חֵנָם, *chinam* is translated by our Greek word δωρεά, *dorea*:

Ex 21:2 If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment.

2Sam 24:24 However, the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price, for I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God which cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

Is 52:3 For thus says the LORD, "You were sold for nothing and you will be redeemed without money."

The idea, then, of a "gift" has to do with the picture of being set free without payment—the sabbatical year (שְׁמִטָּה, *sh'mittah*) and the Jubilee (יּוֹבֵל, *yovel*) thus set up the framework for God's revelation of His method for declaring a sinner righteous, not on the basis of their own efforts or payment, but entirely as a free gift.

This concept, then, of the free gift is substantiated by the added phrase "of His grace"—it is a gift of His grace. The Greek actually has the dative where we might expect the genitive, so that literally we might translate "gift by His grace," which is not substantially different in meaning. The dative of means, however, indicates the avenue through which we did receive the gift, i.e., through the means of His grace. The genitive (of His grace) would emphasize the source of the gift more than the means by which it was given. Of course, both are true, for God's grace is both the source and the means of giving the divine gift of the Messiah.

through the redemption which is in Messiah Yeshua – two questions confront us at the outset of this phrase: 1) to what does the phrase attach, and 2) what is the meaning of "redemption" (λύτρον, *lutron*)?

As to the first question it is clear that the phrase attaches to the opening participle (being justified), so that it describes the exact means by which, in God's method of salvation, a sinner is declared righteous. This means is one of redemption, a redemption accomplished through the work of Messiah.

The second question is exactly what Paul meant by using the word "redemption." The Greek word is λύτρον, *lutron*, but the argument rages among scholars as to whether the word simply describes "deliverance," "emancipation" without any sense of "payment," or whether the word always entails the idea of a ransom paid. While it appears that one cannot be dogmatic on this issue, the evidence in my opinion is weighted toward the idea that the word and its cognates (as ἀπολύτρωσις, *apolutrosis*, used here) always carries with it some sense of paying the price necessary for deliverance. The evidence to support this is:

- 1) the word group in the non-biblical Greek literature seems to always retain the idea of "payment of price" in the process of deliverance;
- 2) the Lxx's use of the word group, while not consistent, seems often to attach the meaning of payment of price to the word.
- 3) Paul's use of the word elsewhere in 1Cor 6:20; 7:23 where those who are be-

lievers have been “bought with a price,” as well as his use of the term in Gal 3:13 and 4:5 would favor the idea of a price paid for redemption.

- 4) The use of the term elsewhere in the Apostolic Scriptures often incorporates the idea of payment of price (Mk 10:45; Acts 20:28; 1Ti 2:6; 1Pet 1:18f; Rev 5:9)

Thus, our right standing before God has come about by a decisive and historical act of God, brought about by His own, sovereign initiative and carried out by His own strength through payment of a price. This redemption which He wrought is a redemption from the slavery of sin and the inevitable condemnation and wrath of God which it brings upon the sinner. Through the payment of the price, His justice is satisfied, and He is therefore able to redeem the guilty sinner from the bonds of slavery and to bring him into freedom. In this way God is both “just and the justifier” (v. 26).

which is in Messiah Yeshua – that is, in the work which He has accomplished. It is interesting that Paul reverses the ordering of the names. In v. 22 it is Yeshua Messiah—is this significant? It may well be that by putting Messiah first, Paul focuses our attention upon the finished work of redemption (that for which Messiah came) rather than upon our present union with Him. While it certainly is true that union with the Messiah through faith in Him is the only channel through which an individual personally receives the benefits of salvation, the redemption upon which Paul here focuses is the redemption gained by Yeshua at the cross.

in Messiah Yeshua – the redemption which Paul here delineates is “in Messiah Yeshua.” This is the first time in the book that Paul utilizes this, one of his favorite phrases (he uses it approximately 75 times in the entirety of his epistles) and it is important for us to ask what he means by “in Messiah Yeshua.”

The Greek preposition “in” (*ἐν, en*) can be used to indicate “means,” i.e., the means by which something is done or accomplished. Thus, one might suggest that the meaning here is that the redemption is carried out by Yeshua—“by the redemption which Yeshua accomplished.” The difficulty with this explanation, however, is that elsewhere Paul speaks of the believer being “in Messiah Yeshua,” using the same language as he uses here. Note, for instance:

2Cor 5:17 Therefore if any man is in Messiah, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua.

1Th 4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Messiah shall rise first.

So while it is possible at times that the phrase “in Messiah” may mean “by means of Messiah,” there is clear evidence that Paul often had a different sense in mind.

Apparently he actually saw all who had true faith as being so much in union with the Messiah that he could describe them as “in Messiah.” That is to say, like the sacrifice of old, upon which the worshiper placed his hands, stood in every way as a substitute for the sinner, so Yeshua is that sacrifice taking the place of the one who believes in Him by faith. Thus, to be “in Messiah Yeshua” is to have all of His work accredited to oneself, and to be viewed by the Father in precisely the same way as He views His own Son. To be “in Messiah” is to be entirely encompassed by His majesty and therefore safe from all and every harm which might otherwise destroy. For Paul, there is only one locus of salvation—“in Messiah.” Even as the Temple and the priesthood which served within it constituted the only God-ordained place of atonement under the Aaronic priesthood as the foreshadowing of Messiah, so Yeshua is the only place of eternal forgiveness. The only hope the sinner has is to be “in Messiah Yeshua.”

We should also reckon with the fact that in the 1st Century, rabbinic theology accorded high significance to being “in Israel,” that is, having the status of being an Israelite. However,

Yeshua as the Messiah is the zenith of Israel, the full expression of the Servant of the Lord. Thus, while the Sages may have considered “being in Israel” the means of righteousness in God’s eyes, Paul saw being “in Messiah” as the true way of being “in Israel,” and thus the true way of being reckoned righteous in God’s eyes.

25–26 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Yeshua.

The opening word “whom” (Greek ὃν, *hon*) can be understood either as “whom” or “which,” allowing the following description to apply either to Yeshua Himself, or to the redemption which He brought about.

The verb translated “displayed” is προτιθέναι, *protithenai*, and is used only three times in the Apostolic Scriptures (Rom 1:13; 3:25; Eph 1:9). Its main meanings are (1) “to purpose,” “propose to oneself,” and (2) “set forth publicly,” “display.”

Many have found the second definition most appealing (NASB, NIV, RSV, KJV, NKJV, and many commentators). But Cranfield shows compelling reasons to understand the word’s use here as meaning “purpose”: (1) it is used this way in 1:13 and Eph 1:9, (2) the related (and cognate) verb πρόθεσις, *prothesis*, in eight of its twelve occurrences in the Apostolic Writings, means “purpose” (the other four describe the bread of the Presence). Furthermore, it seems most likely that Paul’s overriding concern here is to show the eternal attribute of God’s righteousness (justice) in light of the cross and the justification of sinners. Thus it fits that he would highlight the eternal purpose in the cross more than its public display. God is righteous because He had always determined or purposed that Yeshua would be the sacrifice for sinners. Thus, His willingness to overlook (as it seemed) the sins “previously committed” was with a view to the payment Messiah would make, thus establishing His righteousness.

With this in mind, we might therefore translate the verse “which (i.e., the redemption) God purposed as a propitiation in His blood through faith.”

“Propitiation” is the Greek word ἱλαστήριον, *hilasterion*, a word found 27 times in the Lxx, 21 of which refer to the כַּפֹּרֶת, “mercy seat.”⁴¹ In fact, the only other time that the word is found in the Apostolic Writings (Heb 9:5) it refers to the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. It is clear, then, that this meaning (i.e., “mercy seat”) must have been attached to the word in its 1st Century usage. In fact, it is from this association with the mercy seat of the Ark that the term gained its general meaning of “propitiation,” for the mercy seat is that place where the wrath of God is conciliated. Thus, to be propitiated to God is to be in that place where His wrath, rightly deserved by sinners, is quenched and He rather extends a call for friendship and peace. This place of propitiation is perfectly symbolized by the mercy seat, being as it was the place where the blood was applied, interposed between the watchful eye of the Cherubim and the symbols of God’s kingship against which Israel rebelled (the 10 Words, jar of manna, Aaron’s rod).

The word “propitiation” is now followed by five descriptive phrases, all explaining some particular aspect of it:

(1) “through faith,” that is, this propitiation to God is available to the one who believes. It follows, then, that apart from faith it is impossible to escape the wrath of God, for propitiation is available only by faith. This, once again, excludes any possibility that one could gain propitiation through physical lineage (=the flesh, i.e., being Jewish) or through obtaining the status of “Jewish” through becoming a proselyte (the works of the Torah).

(2) “in His blood” (ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι, *en to autou haimati*) – This phrase is the second to describe the “propitiation” and should not be connected to “faith,” as though Paul is teaching about faith in Messiah’s blood instead of faith in the Messiah Himself. Rather, the propitiation