

298 The Good News: in the translators' hands

In thinking about the Good News and how glorious it is,^[297] I was greatly inspired by Tom Wright's translation of Romans (my highlights).

God put forth Jesus as the place of **mercy**, through his faithfulness, by means of his blood. He did this to demonstrate his **covenant justice** through the **passing over** (in the **divine forbearance**) of sins committed beforehand. This was to demonstrate his **covenant justice** in the present time: that is, that he himself is in the right, and that he **declares to be in the right everyone who trusts** in the faithfulness of Jesus.^{3:25,26}

'**Covenant justice**' (more usually translated 'righteousness') to me emphasises **relationship** and **righting wrongs**, i.e. **restoring things**. Reading 'righteousness', I tend to just think of 'doing things right' (or wrong).

Now remember, those words were first written to Christians in Rome, a substantial minority of whom were Jews who had come to believe in Jesus. When they were in Jerusalem, they would have attended Yom Kippur at the temple, where the priest goes into the holy of holies and sprinkles blood on the mercy seat (i.e. Tom's 'place of mercy'). What would this ritual have meant to them **before** Jesus (BC)? Here's what I think they would have learnt from the (OT) Scriptures (all of which are inspired, says Paul^{2Tim3:16}).

1) Sin is serious: God is angry when we hurt each other – having to kill an animal and drain its blood points to our needing a serious change of heart.

2) If they came to God in repentance, God would forgive them – and Jews (BC) were really grateful (see below).

Remember, those Jews who believed were still Jews; they still related to God in their Jewish ways – it just got ten times better! Imagine their huge joy when they saw that there was now one full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice for sins. What a wonderful vision!

But even *before* they heard about Jesus, they knew that God would forgive their sins if they came in repentance, and they sang psalms such as 51 and 103:

Which verses to choose? I'm spoilt for choice:

Praise the LORD ... who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion^{103:3,4}

as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.^{103:12}

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.^{51:7}
(Hyssop is what the priest used to sprinkle the blood.)

Do read those wonderful chapters and rejoice at God's free forgiveness – even BC!

But while Paul (and the psalmist) were rejoicing, some in Rome were emphasising God's wrath, and claiming that Paul (and the psalmist?) were 'soft on sin'.

I checked how 'place of mercy' has been rendered by different translators:

'propitiation' – 14

'atoning sacrifice' – 8

'mercy seat' – 6

'expiation' – 4

(Wikipedia is helpful about the ongoing 'discussion' between propitiation and expiation.)

Paul Bev. 22.11.23