**Mercy Seat and Bema Seat by Got Questions**

**Question: "What is the mercy seat?"

Answer:** The writer to the Hebrews talks about the arrangement of the tabernacle of the Old Testament. The tabernacle was the portable sanctuary used by the Israelites from the time of their wandering in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt to the building of the temple in Jerusalem (see [Exodus 25–27](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exodus%2025%E2%80%9327)). Within the tabernacle was the ark of the covenant which included the mercy seat ([Hebrews 9:3-5 NKJV](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Hebrews%209.3-5)).

The ark of the covenant, the chest containing the two stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, was the most sacred object of the tabernacle and later in the temple in Jerusalem, where it was placed in an inner area called the Holy of Holies. Also within the ark were the golden pot of manna, such as was provided by God in the wilderness wanderings ([Exodus 16:4](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exodus%2016.4)) and Aaron’s almond rod ([Numbers 17:1-13](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Numbers%2017.1-13)). On top of the ark was a lid called the mercy seat on which rested the cloud or visible symbol of the divine presence. Here God was supposed to be seated, and from this place He was supposed to dispense mercy to man when the blood of the atonement was sprinkled there.

In a manner of speaking, the mercy seat concealed the people of God from the ever-condemning judgment of the Law. Each year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies and sprinkled the blood of animals sacrificed for the atonement of the sins of God's people. This blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat. The point conveyed by this imagery is that it is only through the offering of blood that the condemnation of the Law could be taken away and violations of God’s laws covered.

The Greek word for “mercy seat” in [Hebrews 9:5](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hebrews%209.5) is *hilasterion*, which means “that which makes expiation” or “propitiation.” It carries the idea of the removal of sin. In [Ezekiel 43:14](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezekiel%2043.14), the brazen altar of sacrifice is also called *hilasterion* (the propitiatory or mercy seat) because of its association with the shedding of blood for sin.

What is the significance of this? In the New Testament, Christ Himself is designated as our “propitiation.” Paul explains this in his letter to the Romans: “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed” ([Romans 3:24-25 NKJV](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Romans%203.24-25)). What Paul is teaching here is that Jesus is the covering for sin, as shown by these Old Testament prophetic images. By means of His death, and our response to Christ through our faith in Him, all our sins are covered. Also, whenever believers sin, we may turn to Christ who continues to be the propitiation or covering for our sins ([1 John 2:1](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20John%202.1), [4:10](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20John%204.10)). This ties together the Old and New Testament concepts regarding the covering of sin as exemplified by the mercy-seat of God.

**Question: "What is the Judgment Seat of Christ / Bema Seat of Christ?"

Answer:** [Romans 14:10-12](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Romans%2014.10-12) says, “For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat…so then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.” [Second Corinthians 5:10](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Second%20Corinthians%205.10) tells us, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” In the context, it is clear that both scriptures are referring to Christians, not unbelievers. The judgment seat of Christ, therefore, involves believers giving an account of their lives to Christ. The judgment seat of Christ does not determine salvation; that was determined by Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf ([1 John 2:2](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20John%202.2)) and our faith in Him ([John 3:16](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%203.16)). All of our sins are forgiven, and we will never be condemned for them ([Romans 8:1](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Romans%208.1)). We should not look at the judgment seat of Christ as God judging our sins, but rather as God rewarding us for our lives. Yes, as the Bible says, we will have to give an account of ourselves. Part of this is surely answering for the sins we committed. However, that is not going to be the primary focus of the judgment seat of Christ.

At the judgment seat of Christ, believers are rewarded based on how faithfully they served Christ ([1 Corinthians 9:4-27](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Corinthians%209.4-27); [2 Timothy 2:5](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Timothy%202.5)). Some of the things we might be judged on are how well we obeyed the Great Commission ([Matthew 28:18-20](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matthew%2028.18-20)), how victorious we were over sin ([Romans 6:1-4](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Romans%206.1-4)), and how well we controlled our tongues ([James 3:1-9](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/James%203.1-9)). The Bible speaks of believers receiving crowns for different things based on how faithfully they served Christ ([1 Corinthians 9:4-27](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Corinthians%209.4-27); [2 Timothy 2:5](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Timothy%202.5)). The various crowns are described in [2 Timothy 2:5](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Timothy%202.5), [2 Timothy 4:8](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Timothy%204.8), [James 1:12](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/James%201.12), [1 Peter 5:4](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Peter%205.4), and [Revelation 2:10](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Revelation%202.10). [James 1:12](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/James%201.12) is a good summary of how we should think about the judgment seat of Christ: “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”