

EXEGETICAL NOTES — The Meaning of *Kipper*, "Atone."

The root *kpr* is defined as meaning "probable cover" in Brown, Driver and Briggs' Lexicon and similarly in Koehler-Baumgartner. These lexicons and many other sources (as the Scofield Bible note to Ex. 29:29) argue from this meaning that the OT symbolism involved a covering over of sin or a temporary dealing, without the concept of reconciliation. The usage of the words, however, makes this definition questionable.

There are apparently four roots, *kpr*. One means "village." A second gives us the name of a young lion. Another gives us the word *kopher* "pitch." The final one is said to mean "cover." We have to do only with the latter two.

The Qal stem of *kaphar* "cover" is not used in the OT. The alleged meaning "cover" is derived from an Arabic cognate, "cover," or "hide," or an Akkadian and Aramaic root "wipe off," "rub off." Actually, the OT witnesses only to a noun *kopher* and other terms derived from that noun. The noun *kopher* is used 13 times. It is translated "bribe" twice, "a ransom" eight times, "satisfaction" twice, and "sum of money" once. Concordance study of the verses show that in every case a substitution price is referred to. The word is never used to indicate a cover or covering of any kind.

The verb *kipper* is used, however, 92 times in the Piel, 7 times in the Pual, once in the Hithpael, and once in a Nithpael form. All of these stems may be used denominatively. That is, they may mean only that the verb is derived from the simple noun form. For instance, the noun *dabhar* "word," gives rise to the denominative verb in the Piel, *dibber* "to speak." So the word *kopher* "ransom," should give rise to the denominative Piel form *kipper* "to give a ransom," and indeed, the verb is so used. Not once does it refer to covering anything with anything. Most of the 92 instances speak of the ritual atonement by blood. It is totally unnecessary to import into these verses the idea of merely covering over sin. The ritual symbolically represents substitution. Only in one place, Genesis 32:20 could the meaning be stretched to mean "cover" — Jacob said, "I will appease his face with the gift." This can just as well be rendered, "I will render him propitious by the gift." The few uses of the other stems accord well with this meaning.

There are two nouns derived from this denominative verb, *kippurim* "atonement," and *kapporeth* "mercy seat." The first word is used eight times and always of the ritual atonement by substituted blood, animal, or money. The second word is used twenty-seven times and always of the lid of the ark which bore the cherubim. Formerly some argued that this was called *kaporeth* because it covered the ark. Brown, Driver and Briggs' Lexicon remarks that this "has no justification in usage." It is clear from Leviticus 16:13-16 that it is called the *kapporeth* because there the high priest "makes an atonement" (*kipper*). The mercy seat could better be called the "atonement place." The Septuagint translates it *hilasterion* which is a term applied to Christ in Romans 3:25.

The third usage mentioned at the beginning, *kopher* "pitch," with its verb "smear with pitch," is doubtless not to be related to this fourth usage. It is paralleled by the word *kupru* "asphalt" in Akkadian, and is used in Hebrew only in the account of Noah's ark: "shalt pitch it . . . with pitch," (Gen. 6:14). Even here the meaning "cover" is not suitable.

We should conclude that the assumed derivation from an Arabic root "cover," is misleading. The usage of the root gives the definition: to atone by paying a ransom. In the OT this was symbolized by sacrifice.

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