

Lesson 8: The Holy of Holies and the Veil

Read: Exodus 26:31-35

Within the Holy Place of the tabernacle, there was an inner room called the Holy of Holies, or the Most Holy Place. During the Israelites' wanderings in the wilderness, God appeared as a pillar of cloud or fire in and above the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies was a perfect cube — its length, width and height were all equal to 15 feet.

A thick curtain separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. This curtain, known as the "veil," was made of fine linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn. There were figures of cherubim (angels) embroidered onto it.

Only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies one day out of every year, on the Day of Atonement. Before entering, he had to make some meticulous preparations, as recorded in Leviticus 16:2-19: He had to wash himself, put on special clothing, bring burning incense to let the smoke cover his eyes from a direct view of God, because "no man can see Me and live" (Exodus 33:20). He brought blood with him to make atonement for sins.

Discussion:

1. Why does the name Holy of Holies or Most Holy Place imply about that room?

It was the most sacred room, a place no ordinary person could enter. God dwelled above the Ark of the Covenant in that room. Whoever entered into the Holy of Holies was entering the very presence of God.

2. The word "veil" in Hebrew means a screen, divider or separator that hides. What was the curtain hiding? Why was it necessary?

It was shielding a holy God from sinful man. The picture of the veil was that of a barrier between man and God, showing man that the holiness of God could not be trifled with. God's eyes are too pure to look on evil and He can tolerate no sin (Habakkuk 1:13). The veil was a barrier to make sure that man could not carelessly and irreverently enter into God's awesome presence.

3. There were cherubim embroidered on the veil. What was their significance?

The embroidered cherubim demonstrated God's almighty power and majesty. They were in God's presence to serve Him and guarded the throne of God. These cherubim were also on the innermost layer of covering of the tent. If one looked upward, one would see the cherubim figures.

4. Read Hebrews 9:7 describing the one scheduled day in a year (the Day of Atonement) that the high priest could pass through the veil and enter the Holy of Holies. What did the high priest have to bring with him and why?

He had to bring the blood of animals with him to atone for the sins of himself and the nation of Israel. If he did not bring blood, he would not be acceptable before God because of his sins. He would be guilty and would die in God's presence.

5. Read Mark 15:37-38. What happened to the curtain in the Jerusalem temple (a much larger replica of the tabernacle) when Jesus died? Who could have torn it?

When Jesus died, the curtain in the Jerusalem temple was torn in half, from the top to the bottom. Only God could have carried out such an incredible feat because the veil was too high for human hands to have reached it, and too thick to have torn it. (The Jerusalem temple, a replica of the wilderness tabernacle, had a curtain that was about 60 feet in height, 30 feet in width and four inches thick.) Furthermore, it was torn from top down, meaning this act must have come from above.

6. What does the veil represent? What is the significance of the torn veil?

The veil represents the body of Jesus. His body was broken for us as He died on the cross. As the veil was torn, the Holy of Holies was exposed and God's presence was now accessible to man. Jesus' death opened the way for us to come to God by atoning for all our sins and making us right before God. The age of animal offerings was over and the high priest no longer had to enter the Holy of Holies every year with blood. The ultimate offering had been sacrificed.

7. What is the implication of the broken body of Christ and the torn curtain for us as believers?

If we believe in Christ's substitutionary sacrifice for us, our sins are forgiven and we have access to God. There is no longer a veil hiding God's presence from us. Although we were sinners, we are now clothed with Christ's righteousness and can enter boldly into God's presence. (Ref. Hebrews 6:19-20 and 10:19-22.)

8. Read Hebrews 9:24. What was the Holy of Holies a representation of and how does it relate to us?

The Holy of Holies is a representation of heaven itself, God's dwelling place, which we have access to through Christ. When we die physically, we will enter into heaven and be in the presence of God eternally. (Additional fact: In Revelation 21:16, John's vision of heaven — the New Jerusalem — also was a perfect square, just as the Holy of Holies was!)