The veil of the tabernacle

“There was a veil of separation.”

There were three beautifully colored curtains in the tabernacle. The first one was at the gate of the entrance into the tabernacle just before the bronze altar; the second was at the door through which one would gain entrance into the Holy Place; and the third was before the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. These three curtains were placed strategically in the tabernacle, each one made of fine-twined linen into which were twisted threads of purple, blue, and scarlet.

The veil of separation

Although they were beautiful to the eye, the veiled entrances of the tabernacle were not designed to be objects of admiration. The word "veil" in the Hebrew means "to separate." That is what the three veils did. They acted as a barrier between God and man, shutting the man out and shutting God in.

The first curtain was at the gate of the outer court. It was over seven feet high, thirty feet wide and was supported by four pillars set in bronze sockets. This curtain separated the people from the outer court of the tabernacle. They could only enter when they brought their sacrifice to the gate as an offering for God upon the bronze altar.

The second curtain guarded the door to the Holy Place. This veil separated the people in outer court of the tabernacle from the Holy Place. Only priests were permitted to enter into the Holy Place after they had made the proper sacrifice at the altar and washing at the bronze laver.

The third curtain divided the inside of the tabernacle into two rooms: the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. This veil separated the priests who were permitted to come into the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies in which was the very presence of God. Only the high priest could enter into the Holy of Holies — and he only once a year on the great Day of Atonement. He could only enter if he carried with him blood from the bronze altar to present as an offering to God. That blood was to place on the mercy seat as a substitutionary atonement for his sins and the sins of the people.

Woven into this veil, guarding the entrance to the Holy of Holies, were three huge figures of cherubim. Cherubim were the symbolic defenders of God's power and God's holiness. Like the cherubim who guarded the entryway into the Garden of Eden, these cherubim stood guard over the entrance of the Holy of Holies as if to say: “Thus far and no further!”

Communion in the very presence of God was to be found only in the Holy of Holies. God had told Moses that it was there that He would meet with the people. He would meet with the high priest from above the blood sprinkled mercy seat.

That was the way the people wanted it. When God had spoken to Moses on Mount Sinai, the glorious manifestation of the Godhead, the very glory of God, had so vividly stamped itself upon the face of Moses that when he came down from the mountain his face shone. It was so bright that the Israelites asked him to cover his face with a veil. They basically said, "We want this kind of separation to take place. We do not want to encounter the Most Holy God in all His glory and all His terror." None could bear the presence of what was simply the reflection of God's glory, let alone stand in the very presence of that glory. Moses had to wear a veil to separate the glory of
God and the sinfulness of the people. That separation was signified by the veil of Moses, then the
veil in the tabernacle, and finally, the veil in the Temple.

In what was known as Herod's temple, there were two veils in front of the Holy of Holies. The
Talmud tells us that it was not known whether the veil in Solomon's temple was hung on the inside
or the outside of the entrance to the Holy of Holies. When the Temple was rebuilt after the exile,
they hung two veils — one on the outside of the entryway in the Holy Place and one on the inside
of the entryway in the Holy of Holies. According to the Talmud, the veils were sixty feet long, thirty
feet tall and four inches thick. Jewish tradition claims that the veils were so heavy it took three
hundred priests to hang them.

Notice how separated the Holy of Holies was from the surrounding encampment of all the children
of Israel. Three curtains had to be passed. Each one would add to the sense of the great gulf that
existed between God and Man. Each curtain became more exclusive. Any Israelite could enter the
outer court as long as he brought his sacrifice. Of all the Israelites, only priests were permitted to
enter the Holy Place. Finally, only one priest was permitted beyond the veil that led to the Holy of
Holies.

The Holy Spirit was teaching the people, even the other priests, that the way into — the Holiest of
all was granted only to one member of all Israel's race — the high priest. Even then, the high priest
had to come properly prepared.

**The New Testament veil**

The New Testament tells us of another veil of separation. John 1:14 tell that the Word was made
flesh and dwelt among us. Christ, who is of the very same essence and nature as God, emptied
Himself. He took on the limitations of humanity without surrendering any of the attributes of His
divinity. Hebrews 10:20 calls the very body of Christ a veil that hid the Deity of Jesus from the eyes
of men.

Looking upon Jesus of Nazareth, the people did not see that He was very God of very God.
Instead they asked, *"Is not this the carpenter's son?"* (Mark 6:3). The prophet Isaiah foresaw that
the Messiah would be one of us. None of His glory would be visible; it would be hidden in the veil
of His flesh (Isaiah 52:14, Isaiah 53:2).

Even though that glory was hidden during His earthly ministry, we can see glimpses of His glory.
By divine revelation His disciples were at times able to see beyond the veil of His flesh and behold
the fact that Jesus was indeed the Son of the living God. John 1:14 declares that the disciples
beheld His glory. Glimpses of that glory were manifested to the disciples through the miracles of
Jesus. At the wedding in Cana, for example, Jesus changed the water into wine. John records,
*"This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His
disciples put their faith in him."* (John 2:1-11).

**The veil abolished**

The glory of the Son of god came to its peak at the moment when He died on the cross of Calvary.
In Mark 15:37, 38 we read about a very interesting event that took place when Jesus died. The veil
was torn in two. Human might could not have been responsible for tearing the veil. Remember, it
was seventy feet wide, thirty feet high, and four inches thick! It was torn in two by the very power of
the almighty God.

Before the rending of the veil, mankind had no direct access to God's presence. In a very simple,
yet incredibly profound act, God tore the barrier away that had separated Him from sinful humanity
for more than 1,500 years.

According to Matthew, the tearing of the veil took place at the time of Jesus' death — about the
ninth hour. At that time the priests would be busy in the Temple preparing for the evening sacrifice.
Hundreds of people would be in the outer court. They would have been witnesses to this
miraculous event taking place. The high priest would roll away the outer veil that was in the Holy Place, then he would enter in beyond the veil in the Holy of Holies. Suddenly, as if grasped by giant unseen hands, that most sacred veil that guarded the Holy of Holies, barring all but the high priest from entering in, was torn in two.

Awe and amazement must have struck the priests as they heard and saw the stroke of God tearing the veil in half. The Holy of Holies stood wide open before all the priests as if to bid them to enter in — a privilege no priest except the high priest had enjoyed since the very beginning of the tabernacle fifteen centuries years earlier. Now all could enter.

God was proclaiming to all those gathered there that the ministration of the priesthood had come to an end. No longer would high priest have to sacrifice, an animal on the Day of Atonement. Jesus, the true High Priest, had opened the way for mankind to come into the presence of God through His sacrifice, pouring out the atoning blood for our sin. That gap that once separated the holy righteous God from sinful depraved human race was bridged by the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Those who have entrusted themselves to Christ may have continuous access to the Holy of Holies.

The death of Jesus Christ as the sacrifice for sin was an expression of divine holiness. It is incomparably superior to that of the tabernacle and the Temple. If you want to know how God feels about sin, do not look at the veil. Do not look at the separation that God demanded in the Old Testament — three veils; an outer court, a Holy place, and a Holy of Holies. Look instead to Calvary. God hates sin so much that instead of separating Himself from it, He became one of us to overcome it. He hated it so much that He put to death His only Son so that we might know the forgiveness of sins.

Instead of one day a year in which only the high priest was permitted to enter into the Holy of Holies, all who believe in Christ have constant access to the Father through Christ. He has torn asunder that which once separated us from God through His death on the cross. From the cross Jesus spoke of divine mercy as no tabernacle furniture or veil could do. The greatest Day of Atonement has taken place through the One who sacrificed Himself for our sin — the spotless Lamb who made Himself a propitiation for our sins.