

# The Veil and the Ark

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Exodus 26:31-34

June 4, 2017

(Raiders of the Lost Ark video-3 minutes)

*Make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen, with cherubim woven into it by a skilled worker. <sup>32</sup> Hang it with gold hooks on four posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold and standing on four silver bases. <sup>33</sup> Hang the curtain from the clasps and place the Ark of the Covenant law behind the curtain. The curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. <sup>34</sup> Put the atonement cover on the Ark of the Covenant law in the Most Holy Place.*

After God brought his people out of Egypt, Moses set up the Tabernacle to be the center of worship life for the community. God gave specific instructions to Moses on Mt. Sinai during

the 40 days he was up there on exactly what the Tabernacle would look like and how their worship was to be conducted (Exodus 24:18).

The Tabernacle would remind them of two things: the presence of God among His people; and a means by which sinful people could approach a holy God.

By exploring each element of the Old Testament tabernacle, we have been learning how to worship God today. Through this study of the tabernacle, we have discovered answers to the questions we have about worship; what it is, who it is for, what it accomplishes, and how we do it. We have learned that we are all priests, and priests are meant to worship God *and* to help other people worship God.

We have also discovered how the tabernacle and all of the furnishings; the gate, the altar of sacrifice, the basin, showbread, the lampstand, the altar of

incense were a foreshadowing of Christ. And we have discovered that worship is a posture of our hearts that informs every action of our lives. When love for God is the motivation of our hearts, everything we do becomes worship, and we are to carry God's love to a hurting world helping people to meet with Him.

#### *The Ark and Veil*

Today we finish with the Veil and the Ark. The veil served as a barrier between the holy place and the Holy of Holies. It was woven of blue, purple, and scarlet thread. Images of the Cherubim were woven into it.

The ark was a rectangular box made of acacia wood and covered in gold. It was not very large, about three and three-fourths feet long and two and a quarter feet wide and the same high. Inside were the Ten Commandments, Aaron's budded staff, and a jar of the manna. The lid, also called the Mercy seat or Atonement cover

was gold, with two cherubim on top with outspread wings that covered the lid. It was always to be carried. Two poles were inserted into gold rings and carried by the Levites. People died or became sick who did not treat it with respect. When David was bringing the Ark up to Jerusalem they had it in an ox cart. When the ox stumbled, a man named Uzzah reached out and touched the Ark. Verse 7 says, "*The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah because of the irreverent act...and he died there beside the Ark of God.*"

The Ark symbolized for the Jewish people the presence and holiness of God. It represented the true throne of God which was in Heaven.

The Ark was kept in the holy of holies. There was only one day in the year that it was seen and that was the Day of Atonement, the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh month—in September or October in our

calendar. And the only person who saw it was the High priest.

It was a holy day so it was a day of fasting. The High Priest removed his garments, bathed himself, and put on a plain white linen robe. He would lead a young bull and ram in to the outer court where he would confess his sins, then lay his hands on the bull and slaughter it at the altar. This was for his sins and the sins of his family. He would put the blood in a bowl, burn part of the bull on the bronze altar, and take some of the hot coals from the altar. Then he would move to the bronze basin where he would wash his hands and feet and enter the holy place. Next he would take incense from altar of incense and put it in his censor where the hot coals were.

Facing the veil he would go in to the holy of holies. A rope was tied to his ankle in case he died from being in the presence of God so he could be dragged out without

the other priests having to go in and risk dying. Bells were sewn on his robe so the other priests knew he was still alive and moving around. That's how serious this was.

He would then dip his finger into the bowl of blood and sprinkled it on the mercy seat, then seven times on the floor in front of the Ark. Then he would leave the holy of holies and go back into the outer court where he took two goats. They threw lots and one of the goats was sacrificed. He went back into the holy of holies and sprinkled the blood. The other goat was called the scapegoat. The priest confessed the sins of the nation over the goat and then the goat was led out of the temple and in to the wilderness and released. The priest took off his robe, washed his whole body and put his every day robes back on and then offered a burnt offering. The sins of the priest and the nation were atoned for and forgiven for another year.

This was done for 860 years; first in the tabernacle, then in the temple built by Solomon in 970. In 586 the temple was sacked by Babylon. While most of the furnishings were carried off to Babylon, the Ark disappeared. Some believe it was hidden underneath the temple in one of the many tunnels when they saw that Jerusalem was going to fall. But since the Dome of the Rock sits there now, no one is allowed to excavate. There is a church in Ethiopia called St. Mary of Zion that claims the Ark is in their church but it has not been verified. So when the temple was rebuilt, there was no Ark in the Holy of holies. The high priest would sprinkle the blood on the cornerstone.

#### *The veil torn*

Matthew and Mark record in their gospels that the moment Jesus died, something supernatural happened; the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Of course no one would know

that but a few priests and I assume they quickly repaired the veil.

But here is what it means; Jesus' death on the cross has put an end to our separation from God. The veil has been torn in two.. We no longer need fear God.

But there was more that happened than just the veil being torn. Hebrews 9 tells us that after Christ died, he went into the *heavenly* tabernacle and entered not with the blood of goats and calves; but with his own blood and sprinkled it upon the mercy seat and thus did away with sin once and for all.

#### *The Atonement*

The word for that is atonement. The English word means at-one-ment. This word is used much in the Old Testament but not at all in the New Testament. What we do see is the New Testament writers talking about justification, redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation.

Sometimes we read of the cross as a victory, sometimes as an example, or as sacrifice. So there are several ways of looking at what Christ did in the cross.

Some scholars looked at the Old Testament. There they saw the Day of Atonement when the High Priest would take some of the blood into the Holy of Holies in the Temple and sprinkle it on the mercy seat. The shedding of blood reminded the people that the penalty for sin is death. The writer of Hebrew looks back upon this and says, "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin."

The writers of the New Testament looked at this and saw Jesus as the fulfillment of this.

And so some scholars came up with the idea of substitutionary atonement. It's the idea that Jesus Christ substituted himself in our place. He suffered. He died to pay the penalty for our sins because

the Bible teaches; the wages of sin is death.

Other scholars talk about the moral theory of atonement. This theory says that God does not have to be satisfied with a blood sacrifice but that Christ's suffering moves us to repent. When we look at the cross we see the greatness of God's love. This delivers us from fear and kindles in us answering love. We respond to love with love and no longer live in selfishness and sin.

Probably the best known hymn that reflects this view is Isaac Watts' "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross". Every line of it emphasizes the effect of the observer of surveying the cross. The last line states that such amazing love demands my soul, my life, my all. Because Christ gave his all, we must give our all.

One proponent of Moral Atonement said, "Jesus' life and death are intended to

inspire us to take up our cross daily in service of some good cause.”

Still another way the church has looked at what happened on the cross was that God offered his son as a ransom for us, a bargain the evil one eagerly accepted. When, however, Satan got Christ down into hell he found that he could not hold him. On the third day Christ rose triumphant and left Satan without either his original prisoners or the ransom he accepted in their stead. It was called the devil ransom theory. But there were some problems theologically with the idea that made it gradually fall out of favor.

One more way of looking at Christ's atoning work was a cosmic victory. The devil and all the hosts of evil were defeated. Sin is conquered. Obedience has won over disobedience. Love wins out over hate, life wins out over death and it has changed everything. Read, or better yet, sing the great Easter hymns and you

will see this theory of atonement of Christ as victor in almost all our Easter hymns. In Charles Wesley's hymn, *Christ the Lord is Risen Today*, the second stanza says,

*Love's redeeming work is done  
Fought the fight, the battle won  
Death in vain forbids him rise  
Christ has opened paradise*

Jesus walked out of the tomb. And in doing that, it changed everything. Death, hate, evil doesn't have the last word. God triumphs over the powers of darkness. There is always hope. God wins. That is the message of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Christ is the victor.

Christ yielded up his life to God in complete obedience to God's will. Paul reminds us in Philippians 2: 8 that Christ became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. This utter yielding of himself in full surrender to God's purposes is what made it all possible. It was something God did just for you.

### *What difference does it make*

So what difference does it make to us? We now have access to the throne room of God. Because of what Christ has done, we are no longer separated from God.

I have always tried to be honest about my own failures and foibles with you. But one area that I struggle with I have kept secret from all but my family and closest friends. I suffer from depression and anxiety. It seems to run in my family. My father struggle with it and my grandfather had it so bad he had to be hospitalized on several occasions. I was hoping I might be spared this affliction. Like anyone, I would experience depression but it was temporary and rarely affected my life. But about 18 years it started to become worse and so I sought out a friend of mine who was a therapist and I thought I had dealt with it. But it came back to the point it was starting to affect other areas of my life. Sleep was a nightmare, no pun intended.

I would find myself at times incapacitated. I thought if I didn't get better I was going to have to step away from the church for a while. Then my wife convinced me to talk to my doctor and he prescribed medication that seemed to help for a while. But I continued to struggle so he suggested I see a therapist, which I did.

About the same time we had our healing conference. On the first day Dr. Cabot talked about how God could heal people experiencing anxiety and depression. Then she talked about it again the next day. I was starting to wonder if maybe God wanted to do some business in my life so I schedule one on one time with Bobby on Monday—alone in my office. I told her my problem and asked her to pray with me. I had seen some pretty dramatic healings over the weekend so I was hoping something like that would happen to me. She prayed but nothing happened. I was really disappointed. But

she would not give up. “Allow God to show you when and where this began.”

I took a deep breath and began to pray for a revelation but I was skeptical that anything was going to happen. But something did. God showed me a year in my life of great sadness—of the death of two important people in my life, followed by other issues that I did not deal with very well. Sometimes when we are facing trauma we are vulnerable and evil gets a foothold into our lives and exploits that weakness. I told Bobby what I had seen and she had me picture Jesus coming into that trauma and to allow him to redeem it. A weight I had carried around for decades lifted literally in a moment. It was like I expelled all the crap I had allowed to accumulate in my heart. My healing had begun.

I am a different person. In fact people came up to me the next couple days asking, “What happened to you? You

seem to be glowing.” I am different. Ask my wife. Nights are no longer a nightmare. The anxiety is gone though it tries to creep back from time to time. But I speak to it and tell it that it has no place in my life; that I belong to Christ and by his stripes I am healed. I’m still on medication for now and I’m still seeing my therapist because God has been using them to help in my healing as well. I’m convinced healing is both instantaneous and a process.

#### *Conclusion*

The holy of holies is the very throne room of God. And the mercy seat is his throne. Because of what Christ has done on the cross, we have direct access to the throne room of our heavenly father.

Hebrews 4:16 says, “*Let us approach God’s throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and grace to help us in our time of need.*”



What mercy, what grace are you in need of? What do you struggle with? God is here right now to help you in your time of need.