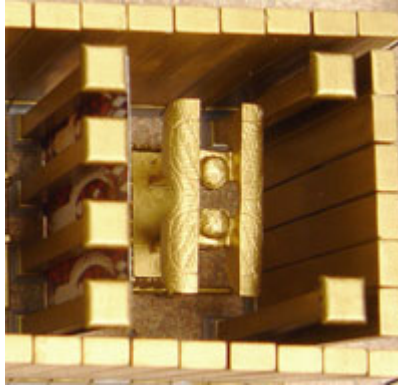


## The Holy of Holies and the Veil



Within the Holy Place of the tabernacle, there was an inner room called the Holy of Holies, or the Most Holy Place. Judging from its name, we can see that it was a most sacred room, a place no ordinary person could enter. It was God's special dwelling place in the midst of His people. 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. Cherubim, spirits who serve God, were in the presence of God to demonstrate His almighty power and majesty. They also guarded the throne of God. These cherubim were also on the innermost layer of covering of the tent. If one looked upward, they would see the cherubim figures.

### ***Cherubim***

*by Micha F. Lindemans*

*Winged creatures who support the Throne of God, or act as guardian spirits. They appear in the Bible (the book of Ezekiel) as bearing the throne and chariot of God, and hence later conceived as a type of angels. They are also mentioned in Genesis 3:24 as guardians (or protectors) of the Garden of Eden. They were placed at the gates of the Garden to prevent humans from re-entering and thus gaining access to the Tree of Life. They also formed the mercy seat on the Ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:18-20).*

*In Jewish and Christian religion they are second in the order of angels, directly after the seraphim. They were usually depicted as angels with four wings and four faces (human, lion, bull and eagle). Artists in later times made them appear as the chubby, rosy-faced, winged infants of which they are known today. They*

*are usually clothed in blue, while the seraphim are clothed in red. They originated from the winged and human-headed bulls of Babylon (also named cherubim), a lesser order of deities, which guarded the gates of the royal palace.*

The word "veil" in Hebrew means a screen, divider or separator that hides. What was this curtain hiding? Essentially, it was shielding a holy God from sinful man. Whoever entered into the Holy of Holies was entering the very presence of God. In fact, anyone except the high priest who entered the Holy of Holies would die. Even the high priest, God's chosen mediator with His people, could only pass through the veil and enter this sacred dwelling once a year, on a prescribed day called the Day of Atonement.

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. Even as the high priest entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he had to make some meticulous preparations: 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, and bring blood with him to make atonement for sins.

*"But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance." (Hebrews 9:7)*

So the presence of God remained shielded from man behind a thick curtain during the history of Israel. However, Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross changed that. When He 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.

As the veil was torn, the Holy of Holies was exposed. God's presence was now accessible to all. Shocking as this may have been to the priests ministering in the temple that day, it is indeed good news to us as believers, because we know that Jesus' death has atoned for our sins and made us right before God. The torn veil illustrated Jesus' body broken for us, opening the way for us to come to God. As Jesus cried out "It is finished!" on the cross, He was indeed

proclaiming that God's redemptive plan was now complete. The age of animal offerings was over. The ultimate offering had been sacrificed.

We can now boldly enter into God's presence, "the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf."  
(Hebrews 6:19-20)

*"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body ...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith." (Hebrews 10:19-22)*

The Holy of Holies is a representation of heaven itself, God's dwelling place, which we have access now through Christ. In Revelations, John's vision of heaven — the New Jerusalem — also was a perfect square, just as the Holy of Holies was (Revelation 21:16).

*"For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. ...But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." (Hebrews 9:24-26)*

### **The Ark of the Covenant and Atonement Cover**



Within the Holy of Holies, shielded from the eye of the common man, was one piece of furniture comprising two parts: the Ark of the Covenant and the atonement cover (or "mercy seat") on top of it. The ark was a chest made of acacia wood, overlaid with pure gold inside and out. It was 3 feet, 9 inches long and 2 feet, 3 inches wide and high. God commanded Moses to put in the ark three items: a golden pot of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the two stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written. We will discuss these three objects in further detail below.

*'The Mercy Seat' (Ex 25:17-22)*

*Ps 99:1 The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He dwells between the cherubim; let the earth be moved!*

*Exod 25:17-22 "You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two and a half cubits shall be its length and a cubit and a half its width. And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it of one piece with the mercy seat. And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat. You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you. And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel."*



*he Ark of the Covenant was a small chest made of acacia wood overlaid with gold and open at the top. The Mercy Seat was the lid or cover of solid gold the same size as the top of the Ark (2 1/2 cubits long x 1 1/2 cubits wide). At each end of the Mercy Seat, and of one piece with it, were two hammered gold cherubim facing one another. Their outstretched wings overshadowed the gold lid and their faces constantly looked down upon it. They were symbols of the presence and holiness of the Lord and are His chosen instruments of judgment toward any sinful approach toward the presence of the Lord and as they look upon the blood the wrath of God is appeased and they are at peace.*

*After the children of Israel had journeyed to Mount Sinai God told Moses on the mountain that He would pitch His tent among them on their journeys:*

*Exod 25:8-9 "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it."*

*When God revealed the pattern of the tabernacle and the way to approach Him He also declared exactly where He would meet Moses:*

*Exod 25:22 "And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel."*

*So the outstretched wings of the cherubim were to provide a throne for the God where He would mediate His rule on the earth as a representation of the real throne in heaven:*

*1 Sam 4:4 So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. (NIV)*

*When God had spoken to Moses out of the midst of the cloud upon Sinai, He also told him that He would come down to speak with him in the midst of His people. It was from the area above the Mercy Seat that He did:*

*Num 7:89 Now when Moses went into the tabernacle of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice of One speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the Testimony, from between the two cherubim; thus He spoke to him.*



*The Mercy Seat was where the blood was sprinkled.*

*In the New Testament this Mercy Seat or atonement cover is spoken of twice.*

*Heb 9:2-5 "For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle, which is, called the Holiest of All, which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail."*

*Rom 3:23-26 "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 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, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."*

The Greek word for Mercy Seat is 'hilasterion'. It is used here in Romans 3:25 where Paul says (literally) that God presented Christ as a propitiation or 'mercy seat'. This means that Jesus Christ is the mercy seat.

The Mercy Seat did not derive its worth from the purity of its gold but from the fact that it was the place where the blood of sacrifice was sprinkled in the presence of Yahweh.

The word for "mercy seat" is the same root for the word "atonement". It means to cover, cancel, appease, or cleanse.

The Greek equivalent is the word "propitiation".

The atonement cover was the lid for the ark. On top of it stood two cherubim (angels) at the two ends, facing each other. The cherubim, symbols of God's divine presence and power, were facing downward toward the ark with outstretched wings that covered the atonement cover. The whole structure was beaten out of one piece of pure gold. The atonement cover was God's dwelling place in the tabernacle. It was His throne, flanked by angels. God said to Moses:

*"There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites." (Exodus 25:22)*

*"Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover." (Leviticus 16:2)*

Other Scriptures also speak of God's throne:

*"...the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim that are on the ark." (2 Samuel 6:2)*

*"O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth." (Isaiah 37:16)*

Above the ark and the atonement cover, God appeared in His glory in "unapproachable light" (1 Timothy 6:16). This light is sometimes referred to as the Shekinah glory. The word *Shekinah*, although it does not appear in our

English bibles, has the same roots as the word for *tabernacle* in Hebrew and refers to the *presence of the Lord*.

*The Israelites were led by the "Shekinah" for forty years, after which the "holy presence" of the omniscient God inhabited the Tabernacle and the land of Israel. The "Shekinah" was not always afterwards physically manifested -- as we read in Numbers 35:34 --*

*You shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I Myself abide ["shakan"], for I the LORD [YEHOVAH] abide ["shakan"] among the Israelite people.*

*When Moses and the Israelites finished erecting the Tabernacle, the "Shekinah" of YEHOVAH God filled it:*

*When Moses had finished the work, the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the PRESENCE OF THE LORD [YEHOVAH] filled the Tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud had settled upon it and the PRESENCE OF THE LORD filled the Tabernacle. When the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle, the Israelites would set out, on their various journeys; but if the cloud did not lift, they would not set out until such time as it did lift. For over the Tabernacle a cloud of the LORD rested by day, and the fire would appear in it by night, in the view of all the house of Israel through- out their journeys. -- Exodus 40:33-38.*

*Whenever that presence was physically manifested, it was frightening to those who experienced it:*

*When Moses had ascended the mountain, the cloud covered the mountain. The PRESENCE OF THE LORD ["Cavod YHVH"] abode ["shakan"] on Mount Sinai, and the cloud hid it for six days. On the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. Now the PRESENCE OF THE LORD ["Cavod YHVH"] appeared in the sight of the Israelites as a consuming fire on the top of the mountain. -- Exodus 24:15-17.*

Because the ark was God's throne among His people, it was a symbol of His presence and power with them wherever it went. There are quite a number of miracles recorded in the Old Testament surrounding the ark: With the presence of the ark, the waters of the River Jordan divided so the Israelites could cross on dry land, and the walls of Jericho fell so that the Israelites could capture it (Joshua 3:14-17, 6:6-21). Yet the ark could not be treated with irreverence because it was also a symbol of God's judgment and wrath. When the Israelites fought their enemies the Philistines during the time of the prophet Samuel, they disregarded the commands of the Lord and took the ark out to the battlefield with them, "summoning" God's presence. God caused the Philistines to win the battle and "the glory departed from Israel, for the ark of the Lord was taken" (1 Samuel 4:22). However, God showed His power to the Philistines when He caused their idol, Dagon, to fall to the ground when the

ark was placed next to it, and several Philistine cities were plagued heavily when the ark was in their midst (1 Samuel 5). Ultimately, the ark was returned to Israel.

### **Articles in the Ark of the Covenant**

What may seem strange to us today is that, hidden in the special golden box representing God's presence were not treasures and precious gems, but three unlikely items: a jar of bread, a stick and two stones. What were these curious keepsakes and why did God want them in His ark?

The three articles represented some of the most embarrassing and disgraceful events in the history of the Israelites.

First, the pot of manna:

*"This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Take an omer [portion for one man] of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt.'" (Exodus 16:32)*

God had provided this bread-like food for the Israelites when they grumbled during the wanderings in the desert. It was bread from heaven! He continued to provide the food daily and faithfully, but the people were not one bit thankful. They complained and wanted something else. The pot of manna was an uncomfortable reminder that despite what God had provided for them, the Israelites had rejected God's provision.

Second, Aaron's staff that had budded: The people, out of jealousy, rebelled against Aaron as their high priest. To resolve the dispute, God commanded the people to take 12 sticks written with the names of the leader of each tribe and place them before the ark overnight. The next day, Aaron's rod from the house of Levi had budded with blossoms and almonds. God confirmed his choice of Aaron's household as the priestly line.

*"And the Lord said to Moses, 'Put back the staff of Aaron before the testimony, to be kept as a sign for the rebels, that you may make an end of their grumbings against me, lest they die.'" (Numbers 17:10)*

The staff reminded the Israelites that on more than one occasion, they had rejected God's authority.

Third, the two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments: God had chosen the Israelites as His special people. For the Israelites to qualify for that distinction,

God had demanded one thing. They must obey His Law, the Ten Commandments. This was a conditional agreement:

*"Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."* (Exodus 19:5-6)

The Israelites had said heartily, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do," in response to God's covenant (Exodus 19:8). But how did they fare in fulfilling their end of the contract? Miserably. It was impossible for them to keep the Ten Commandments perfectly. Over and over again, they violated God's holy Law, and God made it clear to them the consequences of their sin by sending plagues, natural hazards and foreign armies upon them. The stone tablets in the ark were a reminder that the Israelites had rejected God's right standard of living.

These three articles were preserved in the ark throughout Israel's history as an unpleasant symbol of man's sins and shortcomings, a reminder of how they rejected God's provision, authority and right standard of living. It pointed to man as a helpless sinner.

It may have been uncomfortable to think that God's splendor was so close to the three articles associated with man's sinfulness. But this is where God's provision comes in. When God looked down from His presence above the ark, He did not see the reminders of sin. They were covered by a necessary object — the atonement cover.

### **The Atonement Cover**

Every year, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. Bringing burning incense to shield his eyes from a direct view of God's glory, he sprinkled blood from a bull onto the atonement cover for his and his household's sins, then sprinkled blood from a goat for all the sins of Israel. God promised that when He saw the blood, it would cover over man's sin. (To *atone for* means to *cover over* — hence the name *atonement cover*.) God did not see the sin anymore but the provision instead, and it appeased His wrath.

The Israelites found acceptance with God by believing His word to be true — that when their sins were covered by blood, God temporarily overlooked their sins as if they had been obliterated. But Jesus Christ has become *our* permanent atonement cover. Through Jesus' blood, our sins have been covered over. When God looks at us, He doesn't see our sin, but the provision: His own Son. Jesus lay down His life for us as an innocent sacrifice so that God would look on us and see His perfection.

The atonement cover was God's throne in the midst of the Israelites. God is on His throne today in heaven and Jesus, our high priest, is at His right side. When we come to God now, we approach a throne of grace.

*"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:16)*

## **The Sacrifice**

*The sacrifice consisted of Lambs, the Red Heifer, Bulls and two goats. The two goats belonged to the appointed sacrifice of the day. The High Priest had a box in which there were two discs on which the lot was cast concerning the fate of the goats. One was the scapegoat, Hebrew "Azazel", which carried away all the sins of the Children of Israel into the desert place to die. **"And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions and all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited; and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness."** (Leviticus 16:21-22)*

*The second goat was killed by the High Priest in the Temple and its blood sprinkled to make atonement. At this time, of the day of Atonement, the High Priest was ready to enter the Most Holy Place, Holy of Holies, to finish the atonement ritual. He had with him the blood that was taken from the sacrifices and he would sprinkle the altar of burnt-offering, the altar of incense, in the Holy place, and the veil, cleansing them from the defilement of sin. He then entered in the Holy of Holies, not without the blood, and sprinkled the Most Holy Place where the Ark of the Covenant was placed and the **"Mercy Seat"** overshadowing it. Above the 'Mercy Seat', between the Cherubims, was the, **"Shekina Glory"**, - the visible presence of God in a cloud. [Look at the picture, where the High Priest stands before the Ark of the Covenant, for here he brings the blood from the sacrifice, (bowl in left hand), to place it upon the horns of the Ark and the Mercy Seat.] It is here that the High Priest appeared before the very presence of God, imploring the Lord by His mysterious and sacred Name, "Jehovah".*

*While the High Priest was in the Most Holy Place, in the very presence of God, the people waited outside with a mounting tension of suspense as to the health of the Priest. For on the bottom of the garment of the Priest were bells attached and the people were listening for them and hearing them they knew that he was all right. The silence was deafening, for if the Lord did not acknowledge the sacrifice, and the Priest dies, or if the Priest was not worthy and he dies, the bells would stop sounding.*

*With a louder sounding of the bells and upon seeing the High Priest, there was a crescendo of great joy from the people, for the Lord had accepted the sacrifice and they were forgiven from their sins. He said, **"Your sins are forgiven"**. There **is** great rejoicing for they are truly forgiven, from their maker and Lord of Hosts. This 'crescendo' of joy, I think today, is the again reciting of the **'Shema'**, which is as follows: **Shema, Israel, Adonoy elohenu, Adonoy***

***Echad. Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord.*** (Deut. 6:4) *This is the witness of Israel concerning the Lord and to the world that there is One God and One Lord.*

*Do you know that this is the work of Israel to the world? Let's look at this from the Word of the Lord. "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen; that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am He: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no Saviour....therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God". (Isaiah 43:10-12)*

*Do we believe in God? It is because of Israel, we believe. Is it any wonder that the devil wants to silence Israel, then he can say, "See there is no God, all your faith is in vain." All that God hath said will come to pass no matter what man does or says, and what Satan tries to do to Israel. Israel **is** because of God, and **will be** because of God. "I am the Lord, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King." (Isaiah 43:15)*

## **Articles in the Ark — Revisited**

The three items in the ark that served as a sore reminder of man's shortcomings have taken on a different meaning since Jesus Christ redeemed us from our sins. Let's review the three articles and see how they point to Christ.

**First, the pot of manna:** When Jesus came and walked on earth, he didn't reject God's provision. Rather, He became God's provision to us. Manna, the bread from heaven, in itself did not impart life. But Jesus told us that He is the true bread from heaven.

*"Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die.'"* (John 6:32, 48-50)

**Second, Aaron's budding staff:** Jesus didn't reject God's authority. Instead, He submitted Himself to the Father's will and died on the cross.

*"For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me."* (John 6:38)

But He came back to life like Aaron's budding rod, "the firstfruits from the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:20).

*"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." (John 11:15-26)*

**Third, the Ten Commandments:** Jesus didn't reject God's right standard of living. He lived a sinless life and obeyed God's law perfectly, becoming our perfect sacrifice and intercessor. His sacrifice instituted a new covenant that was not based on the Law.

*"But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe." (Romans 3:20-22)*