

Hebrews 9:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all;

Analysis

And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all.

This verse describes the Most Holy Place (*hagia hagion*, ἀγία ἀγίων), the innermost sanctuary of the Tabernacle where God's presence dwelt above the ark of the covenant. The "second veil" (Greek *deuteron katapetasma*, δεύτερον καταπέτασμα) refers to the curtain separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place—a barrier signifying the separation between holy God and sinful humanity.

This inner veil was approximately 4 inches thick, woven from blue, purple, and scarlet yarn with cherubim embroidered on it (Exodus 26:31-33). Only the high priest could pass through this veil, and only once per year on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), carrying blood to make atonement for Israel's sins (Leviticus 16). The restricted access emphasized both God's holiness and humanity's sinfulness—the gulf requiring a mediator.

The author of Hebrews uses this imagery to highlight Christ's superior priesthood and sacrifice. Unlike the earthly high priest who entered the Holy of Holies annually with animal blood, Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary once for all with His own blood (Hebrews 9:11-12). When Jesus died, this temple veil tore from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51), symbolizing that through Christ's sacrifice, the barrier between God and humanity is removed, granting believers direct access to God's presence (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Historical Context

The Tabernacle described in Hebrews 9 follows the pattern given to Moses on Mount Sinai around 1446 BC (Exodus 25-27). The structure consisted of three sections: the outer courtyard, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place. This design was later replicated in Solomon's Temple (967 BC), the Second Temple (515 BC), and Herod's Temple renovation (19 BC-64 AD).

The dual-veil system served both practical and theological purposes. The first veil separated the Holy Place (containing the lampstand, table of showbread, and altar of incense) from the outer court where common Israelites could approach. The second veil guarded the Most Holy Place, restricting access to preserve God's holiness and prevent unauthorized approach that would result in death (as with Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10:1-2).

The author of Hebrews wrote around 60-69 AD, when the Jerusalem Temple still stood and sacrificial worship continued. By referencing the Tabernacle pattern rather than the contemporary Temple, the author emphasizes the heavenly reality of which all earthly sanctuaries were mere copies (Hebrews 8:5). This grounded the Jewish Christian audience in understanding Christ's work within their covenantal framework while pointing to its fulfillment and transcendence.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does understanding the restricted access to God's presence in the Old Covenant deepen our appreciation for access through Christ?
2. What does the tearing of the temple veil at Christ's death reveal about the nature of His atonement?

3. How should the reality of direct access to God through Christ shape our prayer life and worship?
4. In what ways might we still erect barriers between ourselves and God that Christ has already removed?
5. How does Christ's role as our High Priest comfort believers facing guilt, shame, or spiritual distance from God?

Interlinear Text

μετὰ	δὲ	ἡ	δεύτερον	καταπέτασμα	σκηνὴ	ἡ
after	And	which	the second		the tabernacle	which
G3326	G1161	G3588	G1208	G2665	G4633	G3588
λεγομένη		Ἄγιων		Ἄγιων		
is called		the Holiest of all		the Holiest of all		
G3004		G39		G39		

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 40:21 (Temple): And he brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up the vail of the covering, and covered the ark of the testimony; as the LORD commanded Moses.

Exodus 40:3 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt put therein the ark of the testimony, and cover the ark with the vail.

Matthew 27:51 (Temple): And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;

Hebrews 9:8 (Temple): The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing:

1 Kings 8:6 (Parallel theme): And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD unto his place, into the oracle of the house, to the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubims.

