

## What were the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place in the temple / tabernacle?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Most-Holy-Place.html>

The tabernacle built by Moses and, later, Solomon's temple were divided into the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place (or Holy of Holies). To understand these places, it will help if we first understand the concept of "holy." At its most basic meaning, holy simply means "set apart" or even "different." God is holy because He is absolutely different, completely set apart from everything else. He is completely different from all other things that are called "gods." He is also completely set apart from sin, which is probably the concept that most people associate with God's holiness. This example may help explain the concept further: the word *bible* is simply from the Latin for "book." Although the word *Bible* has become a technical (or semi-technical) term for the Word of God, the term itself just means "book." There are many books in the world. That is why on the cover or the title page we often see the official title as "Holy Bible." In other words, there are many bibles (books), but this Book (*Bible*) is holy; that is, it is different, set apart from all other books, because it is the Word of God.

The Holy Place and the Most Holy Place were first and foremost places that were set apart. They were completely different from any other place on Earth, because the presence of God was uniquely present there. The Israelites were forbidden from making any images to represent God (Exodus 20:4-5). However, human beings are physical and visual, so God did give the Israelites an object that would help them sense His presence among them—the tabernacle (a tent that served as a portable temple), which was later replaced by a grand temple in Jerusalem. The Holy Place and Most Holy Place function the same in both settings.

The whole tabernacle was holy in that it was set apart for worship and sacrifices to God. However, the tabernacle was separated into 3 areas, the Outer Court, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place (or Holy of Holies). Priests and Levites ministered in the Outer Court as they offered sacrifices for sin and guilt as well as the other sacrifices. In the center of the Outer Court was a tent that only the priests could enter. This place was set apart—it was holy.

The tabernacle had only one entrance. Upon entering, a priest would be in the Holy Place, where there were three articles of furniture. One was the golden lampstand, which was to be kept burning continually, giving light to the Holy Place. The second article of furniture in the Holy Place was the table for the bread of presence (or the table of showbread). This bread was baked fresh every week, and only the priests were allowed to eat of it as it was holy as well. Jesus claimed to be the fulfillment of both of these symbols as the Light of the World (John 8:12) and the Bread of Life (John 6:35). The final article in the Holy Place was the altar of incense. Special incense was to be burned each morning and evening as an offering to the Lord. The Holy Place was set apart (holy) because it was a special representation and reminder of the presence of God.

At the back of the Holy Place was a smaller chamber called the Holy of Holies or Most Holy Place. In this smaller room was the ark of the covenant. On top of the ark was a special area called the mercy seat. This was seen as the throne of God. While God is omnipresent, this location was seen as a special place for God to dwell in the middle of His people. This second chamber could only be entered by the high priest on one day of the year, the Day of Atonement, and only with a blood sacrifice. The high priest would enter the Most Holy Place with smoke (from the altar of incense) to help shield his view and sprinkle blood on the ark of the covenant to atone for the sins of the people.

Anyone who entered this chamber when he was not supposed to would be killed.

The tabernacle and the temple emphasized the presence of God in the midst of His people. God was always there and accessible. At the same time, the Holy Place and Most Holy Place emphasized God's holiness and His inaccessibility due to the sins of the people.

When Jesus died on the cross, three Gospels report that the curtain of the temple, that barrier between the Holy Place and Most Holy Place, was supernaturally torn in two (see Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; and Luke 23:45). The torn curtain symbolized that the way to God was now open to all through the death of Christ. The blood of an animal was no longer needed. Hebrews 10:19-22a explains, "Therefore, brothers and sisters, 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, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings."