

What was the Holy of Holies?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Holy-of-Holies.html>

The room known as the Holy of Holies was the innermost and most sacred area of the ancient tabernacle of Moses and temple of Jerusalem. The Holy of Holies was constructed as a perfect cube. It contained only the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of Israel's special relationship with God. The Holy of Holies was accessible only to the Israelite high priest. Once a year, on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the high priest was permitted to enter the small, windowless enclosure to burn incense and sprinkle the blood of a sacrificial animal on the mercy seat of the Ark. By doing so, the high priest atoned for his own sins and those of the people. The Holy of Holies was separated from the rest of the tabernacle/temple by the veil, a huge, heavy drape made of fine linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn and embroidered with gold cherubim.

God said that He would appear in the Holy of Holies (Leviticus 16:2); hence, the need for the veil. There exists a barrier between man and God. The holiness of God could not be accessed by anyone but the high priest, and then only once a year. God's "eyes are too pure to look on evil" (Habakkuk 1:13), and He can tolerate no sin. The veil and the elaborate rituals undertaken by the priest were a reminder that man could not carelessly or irreverently enter God's awesome presence. Before the high priest entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, 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 sacrificial blood with him to make atonement for sins (Exodus 28; Hebrews 9:7).

The significance of the Holy of Holies to Christians is found in the events surrounding the crucifixion of Christ. When Jesus died, an amazing thing happened: "When Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of

the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:50-51a). The veil was not torn in half by any man. It was a supernatural event done by the power of God to make a very specific point: because of the death of Christ on the cross, man was no longer separated from God. The Old Testament temple system was made obsolete as the New Covenant was ratified. No longer would we have to depend on priests to perform once-a-year sacrifices on our behalf. Christ's body was "torn" on the cross, just as the veil was torn in the temple, and now we have access to God through Jesus: "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" (Hebrews 10:19-20).

The once-for-all-time sacrifice of Christ did away with the necessity of yearly sacrifices, which could never take away sins (Hebrews 10:11). Those sacrifices were merely a foreshadowing of the perfect sacrifice to come, that of the holy Lamb of God, slain for the sins of the world (John 1:29). The Holy of Holies, the very presence of God, is now open to all who come to Christ in faith. Where, before, there was an imposing barrier guarded by cherubim, God has opened a way by the shed blood of His Son.