

I

BEYOND THE VEIL

And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony . . . (Exod. 25:22).

When God gave instructions regarding the building of a Tabernacle, He began by telling them how to construct the Ark of the Covenant. This was to be the central item of furniture in the Tabernacle, and the very hub around which Hebrew worship would revolve.

It was here, between the outstretched wings of the cherubim, that God would meet with His people. The Hebrews were not permitted to erect an altar at any other place in the world. Wherever the winds of fortune might carry them, they were required to return to the location of the Ark of the Covenant in order that they might worship God (Deut. 12:5).

Instructions regarding the building of the ark are found in Exodus 25:10-22. It was a rectangular box made out of acacia

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wood and overlaid with pure gold. The dimensions of the ark are given in the Bible in cubits. Translated into more familiar measurements, it was about 3 3/4 feet long, 2 1/4 feet wide, and 2 1/4 feet high.

The ark was fashioned with golden rings at each corner through which were inserted gold plated poles of acacia wood. These poles were never to be removed and were the instruments by which the ark was to be transported (Exod. 25:12-15).

On top of the ark was a golden slab called the "mercy seat." At each end of the mercy seat were angelic figures called "cherubim." The cherubim were facing each other with their outstretched wings overshadowing the mercy seat and their faces gazing toward the mercy seat.

The ark was constructed by gifted individuals like Bezaleel and Aholiab (Exod. 31:1-7). It was to be the container for the Ten Commandments which constituted the Covenant which God made with Israel. It also contained a golden pot of manna and Aaron's rod that budded (Heb. 9:4). Later it would also become the receptacle for the book of the law which was placed in its side shortly before the death of Moses (Deut. 31:26).

Once constructed, the ark was placed in the innermost sanctuary of the Tabernacle, called the "holy of holies." From this time onward, it was never to be seen by anyone that survived, other than the High Priest . . . and he could only gaze upon it one day per year.

The ark was placed behind an ornate veil and anyone who disregarded that veil died in the process. The men of Bethshemesh, for example, dared to look into the ark of the covenant and perished (I Sam. 6:19).

The High Priest, if properly sanctified and clothed, was permitted to approach the ark on the Day of Atonement. A part of his apparel included a robe of blue, purple, and scarlet which was also adorned with golden bells (Exod. 28:33-34). These bells provided those listening outside with proof that the High Priest was alive. Should he die in the Holy of Holies,

tradition tells us that a rope was fastened to his leg so that his body might be retrieved. No one but the High Priest was permitted to enter into the Holy of Holies for any reason.

When the Tabernacle was moved and the ark had to be transported, it was to be covered at all times. First of all, the tent was collapsed in such a way that the ark was covered by the veil separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place (Num. 4:5). Then it was to be also covered by skins and a blue cloth (Num. 4:6).

You can well imagine the curiosity that must have abounded as men pondered what it was like to meet with God beyond the veil. They could not know, however, for such an experience was forbidden to them.

They could read about the ark in the Bible . . . but they could not experience it firsthand. They could interrogate the High Priest about his impressions and experiences, but they could not enjoy those experiences and impressions themselves. All they could ever have would be the testimony of someone else.

Then came that glorious day when Jesus opened up a new and living way into the presence of God.

The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent (Matt. 27:51).

The veil was not opened by human wisdom and the strategy of men. It was rent from the "top to the bottom" by the power of God.

Surely you can relate to the mixed emotions of those Jewish priests who ministered in the Holy Place that day. All of their lives they must have wondered what it really looked like behind the veil. Now for the first time in their lives they had an opportunity to look . . . but many of them, I'm sure, were not able.

Their curiosity was mingled with fear. Just what if God should smite them dead as He did the men of Bethshemesh? Just what if God should cause them to perish as He did Uzzah (II Sam. 6)? Just what if they should contract leprosy as did Uzziah (II Chron. 26:19)?

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I confess to you that there was a time in my life when I would have been terrified to even glance at the gaping tear in the sacred veil. I would have stared at the ground or deliberately faced the other way.

Yet, today I am challenged by the realization that God hath not given us a spirit of fear (II Tim. 1:7). He did not give us the Law as a permanent barrier to restrict our lives forever; it was only a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith (Gal. 3:24).

In Christ we possess a certain boldness which comes from the Holy Spirit. The Jewish rabbi would stand afar off and not even pronounce the name of Jehovah . . . the Christian draws near with confidence into the very presence of God and cries out "Abba, Father."

Our next chapter contains an incredible story. I am personally convinced it is true . . . even though the essence of the story cannot be found in the Scriptures.

Brace yourself for "First Glances" beyond the veil.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER I

1. Why was God so secretive during the days of the Law?
2. Why was God so severe with people who did not respect the "veil" of His secrecy?
3. Discuss the commandment not to take the name of the Lord our God in vain with the Jewish refusal to even pronounce the name of Jehovah.
4. How is the Christian emboldened to call God "Abba" or "Daddy" (Gal. 4:6)?
5. How can a serious student serve God with boldness and without fear since the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (see Prov. 1:7 and II Tim. 1:7)?
6. If you had been in the Holy Place when Jesus died, would you have looked beyond the veil?

7. What would give you "boldness" to enter in beyond the veil?
8. Why would some be afraid even today to enter beyond the veil?
9. How can they be helped?
10. What does it mean to you to "enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus"?

