

veil

VEIL OF THE TEMPLE. Suspended between the holy place and the most holy (Ex 26:31-33); and rent immediately upon the crucifixion of the Saviour and the consummation of His great sacrifice. There were two veils or curtains in the tabernacle (of which the temple was the continuation), one before the tabernacle door (kalumma), the second veil before the holy of holies (katapetasma). Heb 9:3,7-8,11-12: "after (i.e. behind) the second veil, ... the holiest of all." Into this second tabernacle within the veil "the high priest alone went once every year, not without blood which he offered for himself and for the sins of the people; the Holy Spirit this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing ... But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands ... by His own blood entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." Therefore significantly "the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" when Jesus yielded up the ghost (Matt 27:50-51).

"From the top," not from the bottom; for it is God who from above rends the veil of separation between us and Him, and opens heaven to man, as the hymn of Ambrose says, "when Thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death Thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers"; therefore not only ministers but we all alike "have boldness (parresia, literally, freedom of speech, grounded on the consciousness that our sins are forgiven) to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, His flesh" (Heb 10:19-21); rather, "which (entering) He has newly consecrated (enekainisen (NT:1457), 'inaugurated'; it is a new thing, unheard of before) for us as a new (recently opened) and living way" (not the lifeless way of dead sacrificial victims under the law, but the living and lifegiving Saviour being the way). As the veil had to be passed through to enter the holiest, so the human suffering flesh (Heb 5:7) of Christ's manhood which veiled His Godhead had to be passed through by Him in entering the heavenly holiest for us. When He put off His rent flesh, the temple veil, its type, was simultaneously rent. Not His body, but His suffering flesh, was the veil; His body was the "temple" (naos (NT:3485), "the inner shrine," not the temple building in general, hieron (NT:2411)) which men destroyed and He reared up again in three days (John 2:19,21). No priestly caste therefore now mediates between the sinner and his Judge; the minister is no nearer God than the layman. Neither can serve God at a distance, nor by deputy, as the natural man would wish; each must come for himself, and by union with our one Royal High Priest who, as He never dies, has a priesthood which passeth not from, one to another (margin Heb 7:24). we become virtual "king priests unto (Him who is at once) God and His Father" (Rev 1:6).

C. C. Ganneau, tracing a curious similarity between some customs of ancient Elis in the Peloponnesus and those of the Hebrews, shows that in the Olympian sanctuary there was a great woolen veil of Assyrian workmanship, dyed with Phoenician purple, given by Antiochus; so Josephus (B. J. 5:5, section 4) describes a Babylonian curtain, embroidered with blue and fine linen and scarlet and purple, and of wonderful contexture, as hanging before the golden doors, which were 55 cubits high and 16 broad, and which led into the holy of holies. It symbolized the universe, the scarlet signifying fire, the flax-linen earth, the blue the air, the purple the sea. This veil given to Olympian Zeus at Elis may have been the very veil taken by Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) from the temple of Jehovah (1 Macc. 1:22-24; Josephus, Ant. 12:5, section 4). The curtain or veil at the Olympian temple did not rise up but was dropped to the ground, according to Pausanias. So Josephus and the Book of Maccabees call the Jewish veil a drop curtain (katapetasma). Again, as the spoils of conquered deities were consecrated to the victorious ones, Antiochus naturally hung up Jehovah's veil in the temple of Olympian Zeus; for this was the very god to whom he dedicated the temple at Jerusalem, after defiling and plundering it (2 Macc. 6:2).