


THE HOLY OF HOLIES

by Rabbi Yoav Elan

Beyond the Holy was 1 cubit (1½ feet) of space called the *Traksin* which divided the Holy from the Holy of Holies. This word is derived from the Greek, connoting a place which is both *inside and outside*, since it divided between the inside—the Holy of Holies—and the outer Holy. In the First Temple there was a wall built in this space with a doorway opening to the Holy of Holies. However, in the Second Temple the ceiling of the Sanctuary was 40 cubits (60 feet) high, 10 cubits (15 feet) higher than in the First Temple, and it was not possible at that time to construct a structurally sound wall which was 40 cubits tall and only 1 cubit thick. They could not make the wall any thicker since that would take away space from either the Holy or the Holy of Holies, the dimensions of which were not subject to modification. Therefore, they hung two curtains across the Holy in place of the original wall to act as the divider. One curtain would have sufficed but for their uncertainty as to whether that wall was considered part of the Holy or the Holy of Holies, thus they hung two curtains on either side of the *Traksin* and left that 1 cubit as undefined.

 Looking west within the Holy. Inner Altar is in the center.

The outer curtain was folded back at the southern end and held by a golden band and the inner curtain was similarly folded back at the northern end. This allowed the *Kohen Gadol* to walk between them without having to open them manually as he entered the Holy of Holies on *Yom Kippur* while at

the same time they completely blocked off the interior of the Holy of Holies from the view of anyone standing in the Holy.

The innermost chamber of the Sanctuary was the Holy of Holies. It measured 20 cubits (30 feet) square and, like the Holy, was plated with gold and set with precious stones. Protruding 3 fingerbreadths (2¼ inches) above the floor was the Foundation Stone and on this stone they placed the Ark during the First Temple era. In the Second Temple the Holy of Holies was empty since the Ark had been concealed in a labyrinth of underground tunnels before the First Temple was destroyed. The Holy of Holies also had windows which, according to Josephus, were angled so that no one could see in from the outside.

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