

## The Scariest House of All

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When I was little girl, my family often visited my Grandparents' farm. My sister and I could explore the barn, climb on the tractor or pretend to drive the old broken-down farm truck. But there was one place where we were forbidden to play. We were not allowed to go near the old house—the one that had been empty for as long as I could remember.

If this house had ever been painted, it was so long ago that every flake had been bleached away by the sun. If you looked carefully, you might see a snake poking its head up through one of the knotholes in the porch floor. Wasps had built their nests in the eaves, and bats hung upside down from the rafters. Peeking in the cracked windows, we could see great spider webs across the inside doorways, and on the dusty floor, small animal footprints. The house made funny, groaning sounds in the wind.

If any house looked like it *could* be haunted, it was this ramshackle old farmhouse. It wasn't really haunted, of course—we knew that—but sometimes it *seemed* like it could be. It seemed especially likely when my cousins dared me to go inside.

Foolishly taking their dare, I crept slowly onto the porch and tapped the door with my toe. It creaked open and I peered into the gloomy room, too afraid to go forward and too ashamed to admit my fear and go back. I didn't want to be called a scaredy cat! But what if it *was* haunted? What spooky things might happen if I went in? I stood on the porch for the longest time, trembling in fear and hoping my mom would see me and call me away.

In a funny way, as I stood there at that door I was like the high priest of Israel getting ready to go into the holiest part of the temple. Long ago, God gave instructions about how He was to be worshipped. Part of those instructions explained to the Jewish high priest *exactly* what he was supposed to do to prepare for the most important day of the year—the Day of Atonement.

The high priest had to wash in a special way and dress in white robe. Over that he wore a blue robe with golden bells around the hem. Then he put on an apron, called an ephod, and a jeweled breastplate. He wore a turban on his head, decorated with a blue ribbon and a golden medallion. He even had to wear special

underwear! All of this was in preparation for entering the holiest part of the temple called “The Most Holy Place” or “The Holy of Holies.”

The Bible says that if a priest ignored these rules when entering the Most Holy Place, he would die (Ex. 28:35, 43). Entering “The Most Holy Place” was indeed dangerous business for anyone who decided to be careless. This was the scariest house of all.

There was a thick curtain called a veil that divided The Most Holy Place from the rest of the temple. No one—NO ONE—but the high priest could go beyond that barrier, and even he had to be very, very careful. But after he had washed and dressed properly, the high priest could enter The Most Holy Place safely. Once he was inside, the high priest would sprinkle the blood of a sacrificial animal on the Mercy Seat, which was the top of a gold-plated box called the Ark of the Covenant. This blood represented the payment for his sins and the sins of all the Jewish people.

Imagine how the high priest must have felt, standing just outside the veil, waiting to go into the very presence of God. God was his Judge, and if he was disobedient or careless when entering, he might die. Do you think he was afraid? I wonder if he sometimes wished his mom would call him away.

The high priest had to come back year after year and offer the same sacrifice for the sins of the people. Every year he had to go into that dangerous place. But despite the danger, the animal sacrifice he brought didn't really take away his sin or the sins of the people. It was God's picture of something and Someone who would come later. That Someone is Jesus. When Jesus died on the cross, He offered *Himself* as the only sacrifice that would really, once and for all, take away the sins of His people. Christ, the Perfect Sacrifice and the Perfect High Priest, has ended the need for any other sacrifice or for any other priest to go into an earthly temple.

The Bible says that for anyone who loves and trusts Jesus, there is no more danger in approaching God. We can come boldly into his presence (although it is still unacceptable to approach Him carelessly or while loving our sin). As Christians, we don't come to God as our Judge, the way the high priest came into the temple. We also don't come fearing something evil, the way I was afraid of what I imagined was inside that old house. We come, the Bible says, as a child runs to a loving Father. God showed this to us by ripping the veil of the Most Holy Place from the top to the bottom when Jesus died. Now we can run into the presence of God at any time to ask Him for help, strength and wisdom. Won't you run to God today?