
The Testimony of the Torn Veil

“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.

The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many” (Matthew 27:50–53).

Jesus spoke seven times from the cross, and God spoke four times during this period—with the darkness, the rending of the veil, the earthquake, and the opening of the graves. When the darkness fell over the land, there seems to have been silence around the cross from noon until 3 o’clock. Jesus did not speak during this time; at least, if He did, it is not recorded.

At 3 o’clock, the darkness was lifted. Then Jesus, apparently within a few minutes, uttered four statements in rapid succession: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”; “I am thirsty”; “It is finished”; and “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”¹ It is clearly said that the first and last utterances were spoken in a loud voice.

It seems that immediately after Jesus “yielded up His spirit” to His Father, the veil of the temple was “torn in two from top to bottom.”

The hour is important. At three o’clock in the afternoon, the sacrifices were begun. This means that all the priests were standing before the veil in the holy place, at the altar of sacrifice. This is precisely where God wanted them. The hour had been fixed in eternity before time began. Those who were most directly responsible for the death of Christ were to see the rending of the veil. As they stood before the veil, prepared to engage in their priestly ministrations, they suddenly heard the cry in the distance and stood transfixed as the veil was rent in two before their eyes.²

¹Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34; John 19:28,30; Luke 23:46.

²Gordon H. Girod, *Words and Wonders of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1962), 114.

The tearing of the veil occurred before the earthquake, the rending of the rocks, and the opening of the tombs. The earthquake that followed did not damage the temple at all. The temple and the buildings around it were left standing undamaged so that all the priests could see the miracle of the ripped veil. As a hanging veil, it could not possibly have been torn from top to bottom by an earthquake. Any observer would surely have realized that the occurrence was accomplished by the mighty hand of God. At the time of Jesus’ death and during the course of the Christian Age, through the testimony of the Scriptures, God was declaring to the world that His Son’s death had ended the temple worship and the existence of the sacrificial system.

The temple was made up of an outer court, the holy place, and the most holy place. Two veils hung within the temple itself: one before the holy place, so that even the priests could not gaze profanely into it, and another separating the holy place from the most holy place. This second one protected the dwelling place of God. The veil that separated the two holy places was large and costly, being some sixty feet high and made of finely worked materials. Alfred Edersheim wrote of this feature of Herod’s temple,

The Veils before the Most Holy Place were 40 cubits [60 feet] long, and 20 [30 feet] wide, . . . and wrought in 72 squares, which were joined together; and these Veils were so heavy, that, in the exaggerated language of the time, it needed 300 priests to manipulate each. If the Veil was at all such as is described in the

Talmud, it could not have been rent in twain by a mere earthquake. . . .”³

By rending the veil from top to bottom, God gave a three-part testimony to the world.

The tearing of the veil testified that the full sacrifice for sin had been offered. The death of Christ was about the sinfulness of man and God’s intention to redeem him from its clutches. Paul wrote, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7).

Most of us have witnessed similar testimonies in connection with commercial transactions. When a businessman borrows a sum of money from a bank, he signs a note for the funds he has received. Perhaps ninety days later, he repays the principal amount plus interest. Having accepted the full repayment for the indebtedness, the loan officer takes out the note which was signed by the borrower three months before. He may give the note to the borrower, or he may simply destroy it. It no longer has value or meaning. The debt has been paid.

In a similar fashion, God tore the veil.⁴ For centuries the veil stood as a sign of man’s indebtedness to God. When Jesus died, the debt was paid. God rent, or tore, the veil in two from the top to the bottom. Paul wrote, “Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; . . . He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14).

The tearing of the veil further declared that the human high priesthood of the law of Moses had been done away with forever. Every year during the Mosaical Age, on the great Day of Atonement, the high priest of Israel would go into the Holy of Holies with the blood for himself and the nation (Hebrews 9:7; see Leviticus 16:14).

This fact reminds us of the dual function of our Lord’s death at the cross. First, Jesus offered Himself as the needed sacrifice. He took our place, bearing in His spirit and body God’s wrath toward sin. However, in addition to this function, He likewise would apply, over time, this sacrifice for sin as our High Priest. The

writer of Hebrews said, “Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17). John the apostle wrote, “And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (1 John 2:1b, 2).

Christ sacrificed Himself. This truth He made clear when He said, “No one has taken [My life] away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative” (John 10:18a). He was not the helpless victim of cruel men; rather, He gave Himself freely to be our sacrifice upon the cross. However, we must also see Him as the one great High Priest for all remaining time. He is the great High Priest who will apply this perfect sacrifice to anyone who seeks to become God’s child and to all God’s children as they live before Him. By His making this perfect sacrifice, and by His perfectly applying this sacrifice to those who come to Him and live in Him, He has removed the office of the earthly high priest forever.

The tearing of the veil proclaimed that the blood of Jesus would now provide free, continual access for the redeemed into the presence of God. It destroyed the barrier between God and man. It opened the way for man to enter into God’s presence. Paul wrote, “And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father” (Ephesians 2:17, 18). By His death, when the veil was rent, access to the Father was opened to all people. The division that was between the priest and the worshiper was gone. The church is a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:5). All now have access to God through Jesus Christ.

With the death of Jesus, the days of temple worship came to an end. God allowed the temple to be destroyed in A.D. 70 by Titus and the Roman army. The Holy of Holies was the shadow and type of the throne room of heaven (Hebrews 8:1, 2; 9:2–9a). The rent veil declared that we have access to God—not on the merit of our own goodness, but on the merit of Christ’s death. Obedient believers have become a king-

³Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, new updated ed. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 894.

⁴Adapted from Girod, 113–14.

dom of priests, with the right of free access to God at all times.

Who is not impressed by the tearing of the veil from top to bottom at the very moment that Jesus yielded up His spirit to God? It may well be that this miracle of the rending of the veil constrained some of the priests to become Christians. Luke later reported, "The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). The tearing of the veil declared that the price of sin had been paid, the earthly high priesthood had ceased, and the blood of Jesus would provide continual access into the presence of God.

Eddie Cloer



*There was a time when it was death to go in to the presence of God; now it is death to stay out.*⁵

"Therefore, brethren, . . . we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and . . . we have a great priest over the house of God" (Hebrews 10:19–21).

⁵Adapted from David Brown, "Matthew," in Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Louisville: Pentecostal Publishing Co., c. 1878), 61.