



Matthew 27:51

Who Tore the Veil?

The Tabernacle in the Wilderness and the Temple in Jerusalem were divided into two special rooms. The Holy Place and the Most Holy Place or Holy of Holies was divided by a thick woven veil.

The Holy of Holies was the most sacred place on the earth. It was the place that symbolized the presence of God with His chosen people. Only one person could enter that room, and only on one very special day of the year. On the Day of Atonement the high priest would make atonement for himself and then entered into the Holy of Holies and made atonement for the people.

The moment Jesus cried out from the cross, "It is finished!" and died that thick curtain was torn from the top to the bottom (Matthew 27:51).

Until that historic moment the veil in the Temple declared, "Keep out!" Do not enter! However from that moment on the torn veil declares, "Whoever will come on in!"

THE VEIL IN THE TEMPLE

Moses was given instructions by the LORD God to construct the Tabernacle in the wilderness. It was the place where God in His grace came down and met man. It would be the symbolic dwelling place of the God of Israel with His people. In this tent of meeting, at the center of the Israeli camp, were two rooms. One was called the Holy Place, which was separated, by a curtain or veil from the Holy of Holies also called the Most Holy Place. The weavers took strands of blue, purple and scarlet thread and wove them into a white linen fabric so that these colors formed a mosaic of cherubim, the guardian of God's holiness, which barred all entrance into the Holy of Holies.

The LORD God described the veil for Moses in Exodus 26:31-34. "You shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen; it shall be made with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman. You shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, their hooks also being of gold, on four sockets of silver. You shall hang up the veil under the clasps, and shall bring in the ark of the testimony there within the veil; and the veil shall serve for you as a partition between the holy place and the holy of holies. You shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the testimony in the holy of holies."

This loose-hanging four-inch thick sixty feet by thirty feet curtain was there to keep sinful man out of the Most Holy Place. That thick imposing veil in the Holy of Holies symbolized that which separated sinful man from the holy presence of Yahweh. The only way sinful man could ever approach a most holy God is by means of blood. The veil shut out and kept everyone from further approach. The curtain hung there as if to say, "Do not enter."

say, "Do not enter."

The only individual who had permission from God to enter into the Most Holy Place was the high priest, and he could enter in behind the veil only on the Day of Atonement with blood of sacrifices to sprinkle on the veil and the Mercy Seat. No one could approach the LORD God without passing the brazen altar with the bloody sacrifice. That huge veil kept everyone out of the Most Holy Place. There it hung in the Temple on the day Christ died.

The setting

Let's journey now to the afternoon of the crucifixion of Jesus. He has been hanging on the cross since around 9 a.m. Suddenly around noon a terrible thick darkness hung over Calvary and lasted for three hours. As the three hours of suffering was coming to an end at 3 p.m., Jesus cried out in God-forsakenness, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" It was the bitter cry of the divine sufferer experiencing the bitter dregs of spiritual suffering as the Lamb of God. Jesus was voluntarily laying down His life for the redemption of the human race. It is beyond our human ability to understand the depths of His spiritual suffering in those three hours. He was God forsaken of God in the temporarily broken fellowship with His heavenly Father. Jesus' suffering was so terrible that God hid it from the eyes of depraved mankind.

Here is the awful climax of the suffering of the Son of God. He was wounded for our transgressions this Lamb of God. Christ was offering Himself as the ransom for many. The precious blood of Jesus Christ redeemed us. In this spiritual suffering and death Jesus paid our sin debt to the righteousness of a holy God. Jesus on the cross felt the way a lost sinner in hell feels who has never put His faith in Christ to save him. He was suffering the wrath of God against the sinner. He bore our punishment in His atoning death.

Some of the people thought Jesus was crying out for Elijah to come to His rescue. A Roman soldier hearing His cry, "I thirst," was moved by sympathy and took a sponge filled with sour vinegar wine and pressed it to the lips of Jesus. With His senses revived momentarily and His parched lips and throat moistened, He gained strength to shout, "It is finished!" In that moment the work of redemption was completed. Nothing was left undone. It was a shout of triumph and victory. With a loud voice of a Conqueror He shouted, "Done! Complete! Finished!" The job He came to do in His incarnation was completed in full. The work of redemption was perfected and nothing else needed to be done by anyone. Jesus said, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit" and He died. Jesus sent His spirit back to the Father. His death was a free act of will, handing His spirit back to God. Jesus died a victor. It was a triumphant shout of victory.

In that horrible moment Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us the thick veil or curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the Temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks

temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split (Matthew 27:51).

The veil in the temple

The veil or curtain referred to is the loose-hanging four-inch thick curtain that hung between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. There was something about the tear itself as the veil hung there in two parts that was obvious to anyone observing it that it was torn from the top to the bottom. No man could have done it. Two men could not have torn it by grabbing hold of it at the center standing on the floor and pulling at it. It was not jerked apart by a couple of men. The veil did not shake to pieces. It was too thick and cross-stitched and inner woven. The Temple was not damaged in any way that day. The timing of the split veil is the critical factor. The moment Jesus died the veil was torn from the top to the bottom and *then* the earth shook and rocks were split. No violence was done to the Temple or any of its quarters.

The tearing of the veil was independent of the shaking of the earth. The ripping apart of the veil was the result of the shout from the cross by Jesus, *It's finished!* The same cry would be the cause of the earth to shake. At the moment Christ shouted the curtain was severed completely as if a great hand reached down and ripped it apart from the top to the bottom.

It was clearly cut by an invisible hand from top to bottom. No hand of sinful man tore the veil. Nothing was displaced in the Temple. Only the torn curtain was affected. There it hung in two pieces; split down through the middle. It was not randomly torn here and there. The veil was of such tough fabric and so woven that it could not have been rent in twain by an earthquake or falling of a lintel.

The eye witnesses

How do you know these events actually took place? There were eyewitnesses at the evening sacrifices which began every day at 3 p.m. This was the day leading to the Passover which began at the setting sun. No one would be late for this great day of Preparation as people brought their Passover lambs to be slain by the priests.

The priests were busy preparing the daily evening sacrifices. Those who were working in the outer court and in the Holy Place before the curtain doing their duties would have seen either the actual tearing of the veil or the immediate results before their very eyes. All at once, at the moment of Christ's death the veil that separated a most holy God and sinful man was gone! The veil of separation that hung there in the Tabernacle and in the Temples of Solomon, Zerubbabel and Herod was no more effective. These eyewitnesses' attention was suddenly drawn to the inner sanctuary. The priests in front of the veil in the Holy Place engaged in their responsibilities saw it happen. God in His perfect timing had witnesses there!

What was the effect of the torn veil that day on those eyewitnesses? After the Day of Pentecost a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith. One after another they kept turning to the Lord (Acts 6:7).

Who tore the veil?

Each of the Gospel writers implies God did it! God is behind the drama. God caused the curtain that was hanging in the Temple to tear in two, from top to bottom.

The critical thing in this awesome event is the timing of the tearing of the veil. It happened precisely the

moment when Christ died. It is no coincidence when you keep in mind the purpose of the veil was to keep sinful man from approaching God's presence, and the perfect substitutionary atonement of the Lamb of God. Precisely at the moment when Jesus died God struck the giant veil of separation in a straight line downward completely through it. It was torn apart at the loud death cry of the divine substitute. God did it! Finished! ”

Done! ”Complete! God is satisfied with the sacrifice of His Son for sin. His work was done. It was now completed. It was the cry of accomplishment and victory. With that shout of victory the veil was torn in two.

Mark writes, “And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Mark 15:37-38).

It is as if God in person acts, as any devoted Jewish father would have done standing by His own Son's deathbed. He rent His garments. The customary Jewish mourning gesture of a father was to tear his outer garment. Because God reached down and tore the veil in two we now have full and free entrance into the presence of God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

God threw open the Most Holy Place to all men. The way is open now for all men to come boldly to the throne of grace through the atoning death of Christ. Following the supernatural tearing of the veil came the supernatural earthquake.

The tearing of the veil reminds us of the vicarious substitutionary sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

THE VICARIOUS SUBSTITUTE

The scene at the Temple was never a pretty picture. It was never intended to be beautiful. It is a picture of our human depravity. It is a picture of our wickedness. It is a picture of the wages of sin. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission for our sins.

Mercy Seat

Inside the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle was the wooden chest, which contained the Law, a pot of manna and the budded rod of Aaron. It was a testimony and symbol that God was present with His people. The top of the Ark of the Covenant was a slab of pure gold called the Mercy Seat. It was the *kapporeth* or the cover, covering or removal of sin by means of the expiatory sacrifice. This lid cover of the ark was where God made propitiation. It was the place where the blood of the sin offering was sprinkled, whereby atonement was made and the wrath of God was turned away. Justice and mercy met on the Mercy Seat. The blood of the offering was sprinkled, whereby atonement was made. The blood of the innocent sacrifice met the demands of the Law of God. It was the Old Testament throne of grace where Jehovah exhibited His holy presence and when God met man in grace. It was God's gracious provision for sinful men.

“You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you. There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel (Exodus 25:21-22).

All this is symbolism of course, and behind the symbolism is the reality of a holy and righteous God who reached down to sinful man in love and grace. His holy and righteous demands were satisfied in the sacrifice of His innocent Son who died as atonement for sinful man.

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Matthew and Mark make it clear –the rending of the veil followed immediately upon the death of Christ. In deed, it is accurate to say it occurred at the moment of that death. It was through the death of Christ that a way into the heavenly sanctuary was opened. The only person who could die the only kind of death that would satisfy the justice of God and save lost mankind was Jesus Christ.

It was a voluntary sacrifice. He chose to die for our sins. He chose to die in our place.

Everything revolves around the sacrificial death of Jesus.

There was no longer any need for the high priest to take blood within the veil to make atonement. The one perfect sacrifice rendered all other sacrifices incomplete and ineffective. Only the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:6-9).

For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. . . . By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified (Hebrews 10:4, 10-14).

Body of Jesus was torn

Jesus paid away our sins by the sacrifice of Himself (Hebrews 9:26). Jesus took His own blood into the greater Tabernacle in heaven to appear in the presence of His eternal-endless life before God the Father as our righteousness through faith in His blood. He is an eternal, ever present living witness that our sin debt has been paid in full at the cross.

The unbroken secrecy of 1500 years was now open for all mankind to view. The way into the holy presence of the living God is now open for all. The invitation is Whosoever will may come. God shouts there are no secrets. There is no secret way into a deeper experience with God!

The writer of Hebrews speaks of the veil of His flesh referring to the human life of Jesus offered up in sacrifice to God. The way of approach to God has been opened up by the sacrifice of Jesus. The veil symbolizes the body of Jesus. His body was torn and His blood was shed to make atonement for our sins. With His death and resurrection He opened the door to eternal life.

The righteous for the unrighteous suffered and died that He might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18).

The blood of Jesus procured for the believer the right to enter into the holiest place where God dwells. The atonement of Christ has removed every legal obstacle between God and believers. Our sin has been atoned for and we have been forgiven. We have been clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. His perfect sacrifice for sin has fulfilled all the demands of the law, removed the curse and the veil of separation between us and God. Nothing stands in the way for our entering into God's presence.

Can you imagine what affect that torn veil hanging there in the Holy of Holies had on that Passover celebration the day Christ died? The Door is open! Come on in!

THE VICTORY OF THE SAVIOR

Christ is our Mercy Seat. He is our propitiation that turns away the wrath of God. He is the removal of all our

Christ is our Mercy Seat. He is our propitiation that turns away the wrath of God. He is the removal of all our sins. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). In a slash of the mighty hand of God the veil and all that it represented came to an end. God through the sacrifice of His own Son opened the way into His holy presence.

We have open access to God

Every believer of the Lord Jesus Christ may now enter in as priests interceding on behalf of a lost world. Every obstruction to an intimate love relationship with God has been removed once for all. It has been eternally removed for all who will believe on Jesus Christ as their Savior.

The rent veil in the Temple was a symbol of the rent body of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The veil of His body was torn. The curtain is the way into the Most Holy Place where God dwells in heaven (Hebrews 10:19-20). Heaven is opened up for all who take refuge in Jesus Christ (4:16).

The untorn veil reminds us of God's holiness which separates the sinner from His presence. It reminds us of His wrath which opposes sin. No sinner can approach God because God cannot tolerate sin. What is the solution? The blood of Jesus Christ covers all our sins. The cross of Jesus is our only way of acceptance with God.

No one can escape the dark reality of sin. Everywhere I travel in the world I see the effects of the ravages of sin and depravity. But I also see the effects of the grace of God in the lives of individuals who have turned to the Savior. There are no barriers to keep men and women, boys and girls from coming to the torn veil and receiving the free gift of eternal life.

Melanchthon, the friend of Martin Luther said, Faith alone in the mercy and grace of God in Jesus Christ is our righteousness. Indeed, Christ is my righteousness.

Bold confidence

The writer of Hebrews says, Therefore, brethren, since 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 (Hebrews 10:19-20).

Because the perfect sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, we can now boldly and confidently approach God in worship, prayer and fellowship with Him. The sacrifice of Jesus makes it possible for us to enter into an intimate love relationship with Jesus Christ. Because of His holy once-for-all offering, we have been sanctified once for all and now we can continually draw near, "keep on drawing near with a true heart" in full assurance of faith (v. 22). He has made us priests and He expects us to be active in the priesthood of the believer by encouraging one another to be constantly holding fast in faith in God.

What a contrast the writer of Hebrews puts before us. The curtain in the Most Holy Place guarded the entrance into what symbolized the holy presence of Yahweh. Now he declares that the believer in Jesus Christ can enter with boldness into the heavenly sanctuary where Jehovah actually dwells. We have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus (10:19). He is referring to the Holy of Holies. We have this boldness or confidence to enter into God's presence in heaven through the bloody sacrifice of Christ on our behalf.

Before the perfect sacrifice of Christ, the Jewish people could not enter boldly into the Holy of Holies. They

Before the perfect sacrifice of Christ, the Jewish people could not enter boldly into the Holy of Holies. They were forbidden. The veil guarded the entrance, and only one person as the representative of the people could enter only on one special day of the year and only after having offered up sacrifices for himself and the people could he enter (9:1-10).

Then Christ came and on the cross through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. The writer of the book of Hebrews says, But when Christ appeared *as* a high priest of the good things to come, *He entered* through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption (9:11-12).

Today the believer in Christ comes knowing he has been cleansed, set apart to God, and made perfect by the sacrifice of Christ. Because He died for us, we have received a free right of access into the holy presence of the LORD God. The author of Hebrews urges his readers to come boldly to the throne of grace.

We can with boldness enter to God's presence right now without ritual and without performance, because Jesus Christ restored the broken relationship caused by our sins.

Because of what took place in the dark, silent solitude of the three hours of suffering on the cross, we are now invited to keep on continually drawing near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith in Christ.

There is another contrast that torn veil says to us. The Jewish priest had to enter often, day after day, year after year, offering up sacrifices for 1500 years. It was a constant daily reminder of sin, and the penalty of sin that had to be paid.

Jesus is the Door

But now our great high priest has opened a way into God's presence that remains open forever. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6).

Jesus is the door, and there is no other door into God's presence. That door always stands wide open for all who will come in by faith through the blood of Jesus. There is no other way except by way of His blood. All roads do not lead to heaven. All of them go to hell except the narrow way of the cross of Jesus Christ.

All who believe on Jesus Christ are invited to enter through the veil of His body into the very throne room of God. He invites us into His true and spiritual dwelling place. There is no longer a thick curtain separating us from the LORD God. The believer of the Lord Jesus may now enter into the heavenly abode and enjoy the direct communion and fellowship with God the Father by the blood of Jesus. He obtained our eternal redemption once for all through His own blood. We have been released from the payment of the penalty of sin by the blood of Christ. We have been liberated and set free by His payment. Now we are free to come into His presence.

The ground of our acceptance into the presence of God is by means of the blood of Jesus. We have equal right of entrance into the Holy of Holies by His blood. His sacrifice was all-sufficient.

Jesus opened up this new and living way into the Most Holy Place. When Jesus rose from the dead, He became our ever-living sacrifice and our only way to the Father. He is always in the presence of God the Father and in effect making our pathway clear.

Our personal introduction

Ephesians 2:18 tells us Jesus takes us by the hand and personally introduces us to the Father. Through Jesus Christ we have our access in one Spirit to the Father. He takes us and leads us into the presence of the Father. We have the freedom to enter through the assistance of another. He is the way, the truth and the life. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ ” (Ephesians 2:13). The veil has been removed. There are no barriers. There are no hidden secrets, no rituals, no additional sacrifices, and no sacraments that we must employ to enter into God the Father s presence. The door is wide open! Enter in! Come one, come all!

The door of access into the presence of God is thrown wide open. There God is unveiled.

The death of Jesus Christ opens that door.

We have a right relationship with God by trusting in the finished work of Jesus Christ. The forgiveness that God provides in Jesus Christ wipes away the whole of our sins.

We do not have to go back and offer daily sacrifices, or yearly sacrifices to God. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ was the all-sufficient sacrifice that covers all our sins.

John Broadus said, Christ, our high priest, has entered the true Holy of Holies in heaven, offering once for all the all-sufficient atoning sacrifice of His own blood (Heb. 9:11-28); and now in His name we may look without dread upon the very throne of God, and come with boldness to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16; 10:19). ”

Through the death of Jesus Christ, we can now enter into intimate relationship with God. We now have boldness (*parresia*), outspokenness, frankness, plainness of speech to approach God with freedom and confidence. This freedom of speech and outspoken boldness to address God is due entirely to Christ s merit, not ours. His blood cleansed our way, and God has promised to remember our sins no more.

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:19-20).

Will you please come to the Father by way of the cross right now? For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit (1 Peter 3:18).

The eternal purpose of God has been carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him (Ephesians 3:11-12).

SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

When the veil was torn that which kept man from God's presence was completely removed.

Your sins and my sins have been totally removed, and we can now enter into fellowship with God. Sin was the thing that separated man from God and Jesus Christ has completely and forever removed it for all who call upon His name. The way into the presence of God is open to all men everywhere. The veil is removed

call upon His name. The way into the presence of God is open to all men everywhere. The veil is removed forever. The torn curtain was symbolically representing the way into the presence of God by the death of Jesus.

God invites every sinner to come to Him by way of the cross.

We may now come to God with the fullest assurance because He has accepted us in His Beloved (Eph. 1:6).

When the curtain came down the wall of separation between Jewish and non-Jewish believers came down with it.

The blood of Jesus brings every believer near. No longer is there a wall that separates the Jewish and the non-Jewish believers. Everyone who believes on Jesus can now enter within the veil. All may now enter into the Most Holy Place of God's presence through the blood of Jesus Christ. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:13).

The torn veil says to every believer in Jesus Christ to enter in often.

There is no valid reason why we should hesitate for one moment any time, anywhere to draw near to our Father in perfect freedom of spirit. That is the whole point; He wants us to come to Him often.

Jesus Christ is the open door into the presence of God the Father.

It was no minor tear of the curtain. The veil was bisected and could no longer function to keep people out of the Holy of Holies. And there is no other door. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). The apostle Peter preached after Christ had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Will you please come now by faith through the open door into God's presence? Jesus said, "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved" (John 10:9).

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Series: Life of Christ

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