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MINISTRIES

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The Torn Veil

Immediately following our Messiah’s death, an interesting event took place. The curtain or veil in the temple was torn in two.

Matthew 27:51

And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.

This verse has raised many questions: What is this veil? What is its purpose? Why was it torn in two? What was the meaning of this event, and why is it important?

In this teaching, we will address those questions.

A couple of theories are offered in an attempt to explain the significance of this event. The two most common theories point to different veils found in the temple. To clarify, there were actually two veils found in the temple; the inner veil and there was the outer veil.

The Outer Veil Theory:

Some speculate that the torn veil symbolized or foreshadowed the imminent destruction of the temple. Our Messiah prophesied regarding the temple’s coming destruction (Matthew 24:2), which occurred in 70 A.D., about 40 years after our Messiah’s death and resurrection. This theory is founded on the belief that it was the outer veil that was torn in the temple. In addition, the tearing of the outer veil is often metaphorically associated with the ancient Hebraic practice of tearing one’s garments during the time of mourning, suggesting that YHWH mourned the death of his Son.

The Inner Veil Theory:

The most popular theory is that the inner veil was torn. The inner veil separated the holy from the most holy place. Some have proposed that the tearing of the inner veil entails that the sacrificial system has

been abolished through our Messiah's sacrifice.

Note what it says in this commentary from D.C. Allison and W.D. Davies:

Other commentators take 'veil' to be the inner veil before the Holy of Holies and conclude that v. 51a signifies that the death of Christ makes the sacrificial system obsolete and that Gentiles—that is, those outside the cult—now have benefits heretofore effected only for Jews by the temple service.

—Davies-Allison, *Matthew: A Shorter Commentary* (T&T Clark International, 2004), p. 528

This theory is often extended to support the idea that not only was the sacrificial system abolished, but also the entire Law of Moses, the Torah.

Which Veil Was Torn?

Was it the outer veil or the veil separating the holy from the most holy place? Why does this even matter?

Well, it matters immensely. It matters because the legitimacy of each interpretive theory regarding the torn veil is dependent upon which veil was torn. So, identifying which veil was really torn affords us substantial confidence in choosing which interpretive theory is most sound.

The torn veil occurred in the second temple. The sages often spoke of how the second temple shared the same pattern as the first temple.

The separation between the holy and most holy place was a solid wall that contained doors, allowing the High Priest to enter.

This dividing wall was made of cedar.

1 Kings 6:16

He built twenty cubits of the rear of the house with boards of cedar from the floor to the walls, and he built this within as an inner sanctuary, as the Most Holy Place.

These two doors of olive wood were overlaid with gold. Because the door posts were five-sided, this would have created a five-sided enclosure.

We learn in 2 Chronicles that there was also a veil.

2 Chronicles 3:14

And he made the veil of blue and purple and crimson fabrics and fine linen, and he worked cherubim on it.

While the Bible does not fully reveal how the inner veil was hung in relation to the doors, Josephus offers us some insight. Josephus mentions that the inner veil hung over the doors into the outer sanctuary.

He also had veils of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and the brightest and softest of linen, with the

most curious flowers wrought upon them, which were to be drawn before those doors...He also had curtains drawn over these doors in like manner as they were drawn over the inner doors of the most holy place; but the porch of the Temple had nothing of that sort.

(Ant.8.3)(JETS 49/1 (March 2006) 97–114)

As we revealed earlier, Solomon's temple had a wall that was a cubit wide, but rabbinic tradition records that the second temple instead had two veils placed a cubit apart. Because the second temple did not have this elaborate wall of the first temple, two veils took its place in its absence. This is opposed to the one singular inner veil found in the first temple as detailed in Exodus 26:33.

Why is this important? Well, if the second temple included veils, as in plural, separating the holy place from the most holy place, then it stands to reason that Matthew would have documented the tearing of veils, as in plural, not the tearing of a singular veil. Matthew records the tearing of just one veil, which does imply the outer veil being torn, as the inner veil was actually two veils, not just one. While it is not an overwhelmingly definitive point in favor of the torn veil being the outer veil, it is an important point to consider.

So, that is a strong point against the torn veil being the inner veil, or really, as we have learned, the inner veils. Interestingly enough, the actual design of the outer veil causes it to be a better candidate for the torn veil? Why?

Historical sources, such as Josephus (Ant., 15:11:3) and the Epistle of Nazarenes by Jerome, document that the outer doors were supported by a large stone lintel. These doors were then covered by the outer veil and the outer veil was attached to this large stone lintel. If you recall in Matthew's account of the torn veil event, it was accompanied by a large earthquake. If the earthquake compromised the integrity of the large stone lintel to which the outer veil was attached, it is reasonable to assume that is what caused the veil to be torn. Interestingly enough, the Gospel of the Nazarenes actually states that this lintel stone "split" or "collapsed." Jerome also makes mention of this.

But in the Gospel which is written in Hebrew characters we read not that the veil of the temple was rent, but that the lintel of the temple of wondrous size collapsed.

Jerome, Epist. 120 to Hedibia and Comm. On Mt. on 27:51, cited from Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., New Testament Apocrypha, 2 vols. (Westminster Press, 1963), 1:150.

So, the split in the large stone lintel would have caused the outer veil to be torn from the top downward, just as Matthew described.

These two pieces of evidence strongly suggest that the torn veil was actually the outer veil, thus making the more common interpretation of the torn veil unlikely.

So, what could be the meaning behind the torn outer veil? There are several possibilities. As we already mentioned, some have speculated the torn veil symbolized or foreshadowed the upcoming destruction of the temple. Our Messiah prophesied regarding the temple's promised destruction (Matthew 24:2), and this occurred in 70 A.D., about 40 years after our Messiah's death and resurrection. This theory is founded on the belief that it was the outer veil that was torn in the temple. It is often metaphorically associated with the ancient Hebraic practice of tearing one's garments during a time of distress

If you recall, even Caiaphas tore his clothes in response to our Messiah's words, which he considered to be blasphemous (Matthew 26:65). So, one suggestion is that, in the dwelling place of YHWH himself, the tearing of the outer veil equated to the tearing of one's outer clothing, representing the moment that the Holy One mourned the death of his Son.

The author of Hebrews might also afford us some insight, also relating the event to Jesus, his Hebrew name being Yeshua.

Hebrews 10:19-22

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the **holy places** by the blood of Jesus [Yeshua], by the new and living way that he opened **for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh**, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

We can see in this set of Scriptures from Hebrews 10, that Yeshua's flesh is equated to the curtain that was torn. Because of this, the author of Hebrews says we now have confidence to enter into the holy places. Remember, it was the outer veil that covered the entrance to the holy place and most holy place. This is a third piece of evidence that the torn veil was actually the outer veil, as the author of Hebrews mentions us entering the holy places, as in plural. The inner veil, or inner veils, only gave access to the most holy place, singular.

The outer veil is presented here as symbolic of Yeshua's broken body. Yeshua's broken body gives us constant access to God's presence, and the torn veil represents that very thing. How?

In the Jewish Talmud, it is recorded that the opening of the outer doors indicated when sacrifices were "open for business" if you will. When the outer doors were closed, then no sacrifices were accepted.

Let's read.

Why is 'the door of the tent of meeting' written in one case, whereas 'before the tent of meeting' is written in the others? [Lev 3:2ff] We are thereby informed of Rab Judah's teaching in Samuel's name. For Rab Judah said in Samuel's name: "If a peace-offering is slaughtered before the doors of the hekal are opened, it is invalid, or it is said, 'And he shall kill it at the entrance [opening] of the tent of meeting': when it is open, but not when it is shut.

b.Zevachim 55b; y.Shekalim v, 48d; m.Tamid 1-3; m.Yoma 2. Cf. S. Safrai, "The Temple" in the Jewish People in the First Century, 2 vols., Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum, S. Safrai and M. Stern, eds. (Van Gorcum, 1976), 2:888 for similar references in the Yerushalami.

Through Yeshua's sacrifices, we are granted access to God's presence 24-7, as symbolically shown through the torn outer veil.

Messianic scholar Tim Hegg says it well:

If the cracking of the stone lintel that supported the large doors not only caused the veil to tear but also put the doors ajar so they would not stay closed, the symbolism would be obvious: no longer did the corrupt priesthood control the worship of the people, for the way into the true

tabernacle, not made with hands, was open for all who would come through the work of the ultimate high priest, Yeshua. This, of course, was to have been the constant message of the temple service and sacrifices, but having become something altogether different, obscuring its true meaning and intent, it was torn and would be destroyed until the King himself returned to make the temple what it was always intended to be.

Hegg, Tim, "Separating the most holy from the holy : the "veil" in the Tabernacle and First and Second Temples" (2000). Conference Papers. 1273.

This leads into another point. When Messiah Yeshua returns, a new temple will be built and sacrifices will resume. If the torn veil supposedly represented the abolition of the sacrificial system, and by extension, the whole Law of Moses, why do we see sacrifices in the millennial reign? The obvious answer is that the torn veil permits no such interpretation. For more on Yeshua and the sacrifices in the millennial reign, we would recommend our teaching "[Sacrifices in Light of Messiah.](#)"

The faulty interpretation that assigns misplaced confidence on the poor chance that it was the inner veil that was torn appears misguided, as all evidence points to the greater likelihood that it was the outer veil that was torn. Thus any interpretation of the torn veil that suggests that the sacrificial system was abolished, and consequently the Torah by extension, is reading bias into the event and is founded on ungrounded speculation at best.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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