



Question: "What was the significance of the temple veil being torn in two when Jesus died?"

Answer: During the lifetime of Jesus, the holy temple in Jerusalem was the center of Jewish religious life. The temple was the place where animal sacrifices were carried out and worship according to the Law of Moses was followed faithfully. Hebrews 9:1-9 tells us that in the temple a veil separated the Holy of Holies—the earthly dwelling place of God’s presence—from the rest of the temple where men dwelt. This signified that man was separated from God by sin (Isaiah 59:1-2). Only the high priest was permitted to pass beyond this veil once each year (Exodus 30:10; Hebrews 9:7) to enter into God's presence for all of Israel and make atonement for their sins (Leviticus 16).

Solomon's temple was 30 cubits high (1 Kings 6:2), but Herod had increased the height to 40 cubits, according to the writings of Josephus, a first century Jewish historian. There is uncertainty as to the exact measurement of a cubit, but it is safe to assume that this veil was somewhere near 60 feet high. An early Jewish tradition says that the veil was about four inches thick, but the Bible does not confirm that measurement. The book of Exodus teaches that this thick veil was fashioned from blue, purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen.

The size and thickness of the veil make the events occurring at the moment of Jesus' death on the cross so much more momentous. "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:50-51a).

So, what do we make of this? What significance does this torn veil have for us today? Above all, the tearing of the veil at the moment of Jesus' death dramatically symbolized that His sacrifice, the shedding of His own blood, was a sufficient atonement for sins. It signified that now the way into the Holy of Holies was open for all people, for all time, both Jew and Gentile.

When Jesus died, the veil was torn, and God moved out of that place never again to dwell in a temple made with hands (Acts 17:24). God was through with that temple and its religious system, and the temple and Jerusalem were left "desolate" (destroyed by the Romans) in A.D. 70, just as Jesus prophesied in Luke 13:35. As long as the temple stood, it signified the continuation of the Old Covenant. Hebrews 9:8-9 refers to the age that was passing away as the new covenant was being established (Hebrews 8:13).

In a sense, the veil was symbolic of Christ Himself as the only way to the Father (John 14:6). This is indicated by the fact that the high priest had to enter the Holy of Holies through the veil. Now Christ is our superior High Priest, and as believers in His finished work, we partake of His better priesthood. We can now enter the Holy of Holies through Him. Hebrews 10:19-20 says, "we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body." Here we see the image of Jesus' flesh being torn for us just as He was tearing the veil for us.

The veil being torn from top to bottom is a fact of history. The profound significance of this event is explained in glorious detail in Hebrews. The things of the temple were shadows of things to come, and they all ultimately point us to Jesus Christ. He was the veil to the Holy of Holies, and through His death the faithful now have free access to God.

The veil in the temple was a constant reminder that sin renders humanity unfit for the presence of God. The fact that the sin offering was offered annually and countless other sacrifices repeated daily

showed graphically that sin could not truly be atoned for or erased by mere animal sacrifices. Jesus Christ, through His death, has removed the barriers between God and man, and now we may approach Him with confidence and boldness (Hebrews 4:14-16).

© Copyright 2002-2018 Got Questions Ministries.
www.GotQuestions.org