

### **THE VEIL AND THE EARTHQUAKE**

Reading Matt 27.50-53

Here we have two key events at the death of Jesus Christ. First, the great veil (curtain) of the temple was ripped in two from top to bottom. Secondly, the earthquake, causing rocks to break up, graves to open and, previously dead, 'saints' (Believers) to come back to life and rise in their bodies from those graves.

Firstly we'll look at the tearing of the veil:

God is holy, that is, pure, set apart from any sin- fearsomely so. It is as if mighty angels stand guard against any pollution, unrighteousness and sinfulness entering into the heavenly realm. Once, God walked amongst His people in Eden, but now sin is found in every heart. THERE IS A GREAT SEPARATION. It is as if a flaming sword guards the way between us and God. He is in some ways hidden, so much so that sinful men even question His existence! However His hand can be seen in every element, from the wind that moves the blade of grass to the events that turn the course of a man or boy's life. We can hear His voice, from the storm and thunder and earthquake, to the still small voice of conscience and conviction of sin.

Man, needless to say, is not holy. He is full of every type of wickedness and evil. The best of us are a reflection of God but, even then, we are tainted with sin. The worst of us act like devils with too much pride and too little sense.

So, we have a holy God and a guilty Creature. Yes, there is a great separation. The great temple in Jerusalem had two separations. The first into the Holy Place, the second, a massive heavy curtain of blue, purple and scarlet, with Cherubim(Angels) woven within it, into the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the covenant was. The Holy Place is a picture of the true church, the Holy of Holies a picture of heaven itself.

The problem for us is clear, there is a disconnection between Man and his Maker because of sin. However, the solution should also be clear; we need that separation gone and the sin dealt with. A way into the true Church of God and even through death into heaven. We need someone to go and reconcile us to God. The Priest of old played out that part (but that's all it was, a show, with the priest playing a part). He offered animal sacrifices to symbolise the purging and removal of sin. But if this was just a 'fiction' mankind would need the 'fact'. This was Jesus Christ, the God-man, the priest and sacrifice in one. He said, "Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days", but he was speaking of His own body broken, one great sin offering. The moment he died the job was done. He had suffered the just punishment for the sins of those he loved. God's justice was satisfied, and the people He loved, saved. This wasn't just playing a part! But did He achieve? Did He make a way for guilty men to get back to a holy God? Well, remember that curtain (the veil)? Something happened to it the moment he died, it was torn from top to bottom (something no man could do, only God) A way was now made into heaven by His death, for we are told in Heb 10.20 that this curtain symbolised the death of His body.

You need a real priest and sacrifice, you need Jesus Christ. So come through that curtain into the Holy place, having access to heaven itself in prayer and one day following bodily too into heaven.

There was that second event- the earthquake. Earthquakes in the Old Testament symbolised God's power and justice and judgements, e.g.

Exodus 19.18 Sinai, 1 Kings 19.11 Elijah in the cave, Amos 1.1 and 9.1, Zech 14.5.

Earthquakes in the New Testament also show a way of freedom and deliverance justly wrought by God e.g Acts 16.26 Jail doors opened, and in our very text. Our hearts are like a jail cell, even a grave for our dormant spirit, dead in sin.

So we can see, in the earthquake, a warning and a deliverance. Warnings in life can come from God to us in actual words from the Bible and preaching, or from events in our lives which 'shake' us. We can ignore these (like going through a red light in a car or not taking heed of a fire alarm etc) but we do so at our peril. But we can see a deliverance, just like the temple curtain torn makes a way for us into heaven, the earthquake pictures a way out made for the sleeping (effectively dead) spirits of men to come to life v52-53.

We also read of another earthquake which shows us the same thing with Christ Jesus himself- Matt 28.1-2 (we see angels acting 'behind' natural elements). Christ himself is the one who sets us free from sin and death (the 'saints' who rose earlier would die again, but Christ was raised incorruptible with an everlasting body. He is the 'first fruit' and all believers will one day become like Him)

So heed the warnings and accept the deliverance. God speaks to us in these symbolic events. The curtain torn open to make a way to heaven, and the earthquake, warning and delivering through Christ Jesus' work on the cross. Behind the curtain was the ark of the covenant (a symbol of Christ himself) it contained the 10 commandments, the Law which 'thundered' at Sinai, but it was covered with the blood on the 'atonement' cover, also a picture of the Lord's death on Calvary. We cannot be saved by trying to perfectly keep the law (Christ did this for us) but by faith in His blood. When we see these things for what they are, they can speak to us the very 'voice' of God. How do I know this is the meaning? We have it in the Bible from cover to cover- we'll look at two verses to end. 1st Rev 11.19

*"And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail."*

We see into the holy of holies- Heaven, and we see the ark and hear the voices and the earthquake. 2nd Heb 6.19-20a

*"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus"*

We see 'within' by the eyes of faith. Faith is like a rope from earth all the way to heaven, to Christ who pulls us home to Him. But we must grab the rope to have hope, and Christ will give you the strength to hold on and persevere until you get all the way home. What a loving, sacrificial God of power!