

Easter Teaching No. 14

What Happened after Jesus died

The Curtain of the Temple

Matthew 27:51

'At that moment the curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom'

The curtain of the Temple was 60 ft high and 30 ft wide it was woven from many threads and the thickness of a man's palm. This was the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies was where the Shechinah glory of God dwelt and was of the utmost sanctity, even if the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies and God did not accept the sacrifice he offered, he would be struck dead.

Priestly duties were carried out in the Holy Place and the priests would have seen the curtain, but it was only the High Priest who could enter the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur to sprinkle the blood of bulls to take away the sin of the Nation of Israel. This curtain could never have been torn by the hands of men, yet at the moment of Christ's death, God tore the curtain from top to bottom. The ultimate sacrifice had been made, Jesus' own blood. No more was man separated from God on the basis of sin, that price had been paid for. There was no longer the need for that curtain which separated man from the presence of God. God was now approachable by all on the basis of the spilled blood of Christ. The Mosaic law had been fulfilled by the Messiah.

Hebrews 10:19-20

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water

The Earthquake

Matthew 27:51

There was an earthquake and the tombs broke open and many holy people were raised to life. We are told that it was after Jesus resurrection, that these people came out of their tombs and went into Jerusalem and appeared to many.

Just as Jesus had resurrected Lazarus, at the moment of Jesus' death many people were also resurrected to life, and once Jesus had been resurrected on the third day,

they then went into Jerusalem. What a witness, what an authentication that Jesus was able to break the power of death. These would have been witnesses to the fact that they had been dead, and would have been reunited with their families.

Whilst the tearing of the temple curtain had been in private for only a few privileged priests, this resurrection to life would have been public and the talk of Jerusalem, coinciding with the talk of the resurrection of the man they had all witnessed dying on the cross only three days earlier. This would not have been a resurrection to eternal life, but to natural human life, they would have died again at some time, but they would have been cause for joy and astonishment, unbelief and confusion. During this time the religious leaders and Pilate wanted to deny the resurrection of Jesus, but all those others! Explain that lot away! A little divine humour maybe?

The reaction of the Centurion and crowd

Those people who were standing at the foot of the cross and the Centurion, were witness to the earthquake and were terrified, the gentile Centurion, probably one of the four soldiers assigned to crucify Jesus, exclaimed ' Surely this man was the Son of God.'

The Centurion would have seen hundreds of crucifixions and yet this one was different. This man did not shout and swear whilst carrying his cross to Golgotha, he didn't curse at the soldiers as they drove the nails through his wrists but forgave them as they carried out their gruesome task. He didn't rail at the bystanders who mocked him whilst he died in agony. There was also 3 hours of darkness in what should have been the hottest part of the day. This Jesus only lasted 6 hours instead of the many hours or sometimes days it would normally take to die. Add to that the earthquake at the moment of this man's death, and the conclusion this gentile man came to was: 'Surely this man was the son of God'

Because it was the eve of a special Sabbath, Pilate instructed the soldiers to break the legs of those crucified to hasten their deaths, as he needed them to be buried as soon as possible, but the soldier reported that Jesus had already died. To make sure, the soldier took his spear and thrust it into Jesus' side and blood and water flowed out. (see my Easter Teaching No. 11 for more details on the significance of this).

This was to fulfil the scripture in Exodus 12:46 where it says that none of the bones of the Passover lamb were to be broken and Zechariah 12:10 which refers to the piercing of the Messiah.

Jesus was dead of that there was no doubt. He just needed to be buried.