

The Veil That Was Torn

Construction

The tabernacle had 3 veils/curtains.

- The first curtain was at the gate to the courtyard in which no Gentiles were let in.
- The second curtain was the entrance to the Tabernacle.
- The third curtain separated the outer room of the Tabernacle to the Holy of Holies.

The temple in Jesus' time also had 3 curtains. (*Descriptions from THE WARS OF THE JEWS OR HISTORY OF THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM By Flavius Josephus (translated by William Whiston)) Book 5 Chapter 5*

- The first curtain was at the entrance to the temple.
- The other two curtains separated the outer room of the temple from the Holy of Holies; the outer curtain extended from the North end of the doorway to just short of the South end while the inner curtain extended from the South end of the doorway to just short of the North end, and there was a cubit's gap between the curtains.

Description of temple curtains

The first curtain. "It was a Babylonian curtain, embroidered with blue, and fine linen, and scarlet, and purple, and of a contexture that was truly wonderful. Nor was this mixture of colors without its mystical interpretation, but was a kind of image of the universe; for by the scarlet there seemed to be enigmatically signified fire, by the fine flax the earth, by the blue the air, and by the purple the sea; two of them having their colors the foundation of this resemblance; but the fine flax and the purple have their own origin for that foundation, the earth producing the one, and the sea the other. This curtain had also embroidered upon it all that was mystical in the heavens, excepting that of the [twelve] signs, representing living creatures.

The inside curtains. For the High Priest to enter the Holy of Holies he would have to enter the gap between the outer curtain and the South wall, turn right and walk between the curtains to the North wall, the turn left to walk between the inner curtain and the South wall into the Holy of Holies. (*Illustrated Tour of The Holy Temple, Temple Institute, templeinstitute.org/illustrated-tour-of-the-holy-temple-index*)

Factors to consider

The current whereabouts of the Ark of the Covenant is unknown. When the Babylonians captured Jerusalem they may have taken the Ark, or the Ark may have been hidden, but the current whereabouts are unknown. The tabernacle actually did not have the ark from the time of Eli the priest until the temple was built. Then the ark disappeared again when the Babylonians captured Israel.

The presence of the Lord was absent even more. The last time the presence of the Lord was indicated in the tabernacle was near the end of Joshua's life. The presence of the Lord (at least the type of presence which would kill anyone who not holy enough, did not appear again until the it was placed in the temple. Then that presence ended before the end of Solomon's reign never to be seen again in the temple.

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Gospel Evidence

All the gospels say that the “curtain” (singular) was torn which makes it seem likely that the single curtain at the entrance to the temple was referred to. However, the book of Mark provides the most compelling view for determining which curtain was torn. The Old Testament has several *inclusios* (one story contained (included) between the beginning and the of another story. Mark has so many of *inclusios* (at least 12) that the term Markan Sandwich was invented. In this case, there is an *inclusio* that contains the entire book of Mark.

The beginning of the outer story is given in Mark 1:1-11. The elements of note are: 1) someone announced the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, 2) after Jesus was baptized, “he saw the heavens torn apart ...”

The end of the outer story end is given in Mark 15:33 -16:8 [Mark 16:9-20 were apparently added after Mark was originally written]. The elements of note are: 1) after Jesus died, “the curtain of the temple was torn ...,” 2) when the women go to the tomb, someone announced the resurrection of Jesus.

Since the curtain at the temple entrance is described to have had images of heaven and earth, it matches the beginning of the *inclusio*. The curtains hiding the Holy of Holies was hiding an empty space where the presence of the Lord had long disappeared. Nothing to reveal there. The tearing of the curtain containing images of the heavens matches the tearing of the heavens in Mark 1. This makes the curtain at the temple the likely candidate for the curtain that was torn.

[Note: The proposed sites for Jesus’ crucifixion would have been high enough but not at the correct angle for the Roman centurion to see the curtain being torn.]

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Appendix: Markan Sandwiches

Sandwich #1

- a. Healing of Paralytic 2:1-5a
- b. Authority to Forgive Sin 2:5b-10a
- c. Healing of the Paralytic 2:10b-12

Sandwich #2

- a. Withered Hand Miracle 3:1-3a
- b. Sabbath Controversy 3:4-5a
- c. Withered Hand Miracle 3:5b-6

Sandwich #3

- a. Rejection by Jesus' Family 3:20-21
- b. Rejection by Jewish Leaders 3:22-30
- c. Rejection by Jesus' Family 3:31-35

Sandwich #4

- a. Jairus' Daughter 5:21-24a
- b. Issue of Blood 5:22-30
- c. Jairus' Daughter 5:35-43

Sandwich #5

- a. Sending Out the Twelve 6:6b-13
- b. Death of John the Baptizer 6:14-29
- c. Sending Out the Twelve 6:30-31

Sandwich #6

- a. Unwashed Hands 7:1-5
- b. Corban Controversy 7:6-13
- c. Unwashed Hands 7:14-23

Sandwich #7

- a. Blessing Children 9:36-50
- b. Teaching on Divorce 10:1-12
- c. Blessing Children 10:13-16

Sandwich #8

- a. Cursing of the Fig Tree 11:12-14
- b. Cleansing of the Temple 11:15-19
- c. Cursing of the Fig Tree 11:20-25

Sandwich #9

- a. False Christs 13:5-6
- b. Jerusalem/Temple Destroyed 13:7-20
- c. False Christs 13:21-23

Sandwich #10

- a. Plot to Kill Jesus 14:1-2
- b. Anointing at Bethany 14:3-9
- c. Plot to Kill Jesus 14:10-11

Sandwich #11

- a. Peter's Denial 14:53-54
- b. Jesus' Trial 14:55-65
- c. Peter's Denial 14:66-72

Sandwich #12

- a. Women 15:40-41
- b. Burial of Jesus 15:42-46
- c. Women 15:47-16:1