



June 20, 2021

“When God Tore a Curtain

Mark 15:33–39

Pastor Gary Hamrick

At the exact moment that Jesus was crucified, the Bible says that the curtain or veil in the temple tore *“from top to bottom.”* Why did that happen and what is the meaning for the fact that the curtain tore *“from top to bottom”*? It’s an often overlooked verse in the Bible surrounding the events of the crucifixion of Christ, but it’s also one of the most liberating verses in all of the Bible because it speaks of new freedom for humanity. In this message Pastor Gary shares three significant reasons why God tore the curtain in the temple and what it means for us today.

1. The curtain or veil

- a. Pastor Gary said, “[In the temple in Jerusalem there] was a wall that separated man from God. It wasn’t made of concrete or barbed wire; it was a woven curtain, a fabric wall... Unlike the wall in Berlin that was a wall of hostility, this wall... was a wall of holiness because it separated a holy God from unholy humanity, and no one was ever permitted to... go behind that curtain except the high priest and then only once a year on the day of atonement, [which] is called Yom Kippur. [The high priest] would go behind the curtain to make sacrifice to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy seat for the atonement of himself and for the nation of Israel. ... On the day that Jesus was crucified [that wall came down], coinciding with the exact moment of the crucifixion of Christ... the curtain was suddenly torn from top to bottom, and when that happened, it signified a new freedom for mankind.”
- b. The temple (see artist’s rendering below)
 - i. Inside the temple in Jerusalem the first chamber was the holy place, and farther in the interior of the temple was the most holy place or the holy of holies, and it was there that God’s presence dwelt.
 - ii. The curtain or veil separated the holy place from the most holy place.
 - iii. According to the Talmud, which is the written commentary, and the

Mishna, which is the oral commentary, Jewish tradition holds that the curtain was sixty feet in length from top to bottom, thirty feet wide, and it was woven with such thick material that it was approximately nine to ten inches thick.

- iv. The curtain was constructed of fine linen of blue, purple, and scarlet red, and it was adorned with images of cherubim woven into the fabric.
- v. It's believed that it took three hundred priests to manipulate and hang the curtain.

2. The sacrifice

- a. **Hebrews 9:6-7** - *"Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance..."*
- b. The priest sprinkled the blood of a bull on the ark of the covenant to make atonement first for himself.
 - i. The ark of the covenant
 - 1. The ark was a wooden box approximately three feet tall, three feet wide, and four feet long made of acacia.
 - 2. The ark was overlaid with gold.
 - 3. The mercy seat, which was the covering of the ark, was made of pure gold.
 - 4. Two cherubim were on the mercy seat, one on either end of the ark; God's presence dwelt between the cherubim.
- c. The priest would then sprinkle the blood of a goat for the sins of the people on this national day of atonement.
- d. Jewish tradition teaches that the high priest would sew bells into the hem of his priestly garment so he could be heard moving around in the most holy place, and in addition to the bells a rope was tied around one of his ankles so they could drag him out if he was to die or God was to kill him!
- e. Pastor Gary said, "All of this paints a picture of reverence for the holiness of God, that God is holy and he was separated from mankind, that man by virtue of the high priest could only go into [God's] presence once a year to make atonement for himself and the sins of the people... that God was inaccessible [and] unapproachable. ... [People could seek God and hear from God] but they could not approach God. ... God could only be approached by a priest and through the sacrifice of animals. All of that changed the day Jesus died."
- f. Pastor Gary said, "If [the curtain] tore from the bottom to the top that would be an indication that man did it, that the priests got together and decided that they were going to somehow rip [the] curtain even though that would have been impossible [because it was ten inches thick]. ... The fact that it tore

from the top down is an important detail because it indicates to us that man did not tear this curtain, God did. ... [What God was communicating] to us was that simultaneous to the death of Jesus, God was now saying to us that now [he wants everyone to have access to him through the sacrifice of Jesus]. ... **We [are] free to come into his presence boldly, we are free to access him directly, [and] we are free to have our sins forgiven completely.** (Emphasis added)

3. When God tore the curtain, it abolished the intercessory role of the priesthood
 - a. Pastor Gary said, “No longer does man have to go through another human being to get to God. ... You don’t have to confess your sins to anyone except in the sense of **James 5:16**, [which is for the purpose of prayer and accountability regarding our temptations and sins,] not for the purpose of absolving someone from their sins. There [isn’t one] human being who is able to absolve you of your sins; that is something only God can do. ... Jesus is our intercessor, he is our mediator, [and] he is our advocate. ... It is an insult to God and it is an injustice to Scripture to say that even though God tore the curtain to give open access to him through Christ that we can’t really come directly to him, that we still have to go through a priest or another person to get [to him].”
 - i. **James 5:16a** - *“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”* (NIV 1984)
 - ii. **1 Timothy 2:5** - *“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus...”*
 - iii. **John 14:6** - *“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”* (NIV 1984) (Emphasis added)
 - iv. **Hebrews 7:24–25** - *“But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”*
4. When God tore the curtain, it eliminated the sacrificial system
 - a. Pastor Gary said, “Before Jesus died on the cross, God made gracious provision for the temporary atonement of sin for people who had sinned against God. ... [The Old Testament sacrificial system was a temporary atonement for sin that needed to be done every year until Christ died on the cross.] ... [This] ended the sacrificial system because Jesus came as the lamb who died for the sins of the world. His sacrifice [was] once for all people for all time. ... One Savior, one sacrifice, at one time, for all people, for all generations.”
 - b. **Hebrews 10:4–5** - *“For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats*

could take away sins. Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: 'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me.' "

- c. **1 John 2:1b-2** - *"And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."*
- d. **1 Peter 3:18a** - *"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."* (NIV 1984)

5. When God tore the curtain, it opened the way for all to come to God

- a. **Hebrews 10:19-22** - *"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."*
- b. **John 10:9** - *"I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved..."*
- c. **Revelation 3:20** - *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."*
- d. Pastor Gary said, "No other world religion invites you to come to God like Christianity does through faith in Jesus Christ. ... [God] wants relationship with us [and] fellowship with us. [Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism don't offer fellowship and relationship.] ... When God tore [the] curtain, he made himself accessible to us through his son Jesus Christ so that one day when you die, you can stand in his presence welcomed and forgiven."
- e. **Hebrews 4:16** - *"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Mark 15:33-39** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Provide an overview of Pastor Gary's comments about the temple curtain. (See #1 above)
3. Provide an overview of Pastor Gary's comments about the sacrifice. (See #2 above)
4. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks about the temple curtain and sacrifice. (See 2e and #2f above)

5. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's comments about the end of the intercessory role of the priesthood. (See #3a above)
6. Read and discuss [James 5:16a](#), [1 Timothy 2:5](#), [John 14:6](#), and [Hebrews 7:24-25](#). (See #3 above)
7. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's comments about the end of the sacrificial system. (See #4a above)
8. Read and discuss [Hebrews 10:4-5](#), [1 John 2:1b-2](#), and [1 Peter 3:18a](#). (See #4 above)
9. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about open access to come to God. (See #5d above)
10. Read and discuss [Hebrews 10:19-22](#), [John 10:9](#), [Revelation 3:20](#), and [Hebrews 4:16](#). (See #5 above)
11. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

