

## Exhortation 19 – The Rocks Split and Veil is Torn

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Matthew 27:51

### I. The Text Opened

#### A. Matthew 27:51-52

1. “And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,” (Matt. 27:51-52).

a) In the 24th chapter of Joshua we read of this courageous leader of Israel assembling the tribes together at Shechem in order to recount all the instances of God’s faithfulness to them and to present the people of God with a choice.

(1) *“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord,”* (Josh. 24:15).

(2) *After affirming the covenant between Israel and their God and recording it in the Book of the Law of God, Joshua does something very interesting.*

(3) *He takes a large stone and sets it up under a nearby oak tree.*

(a) *“This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the Lord has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God.”*

b) Imagine that. Joshua set this stone as a personal witness to their covenant, and in doing so attributed human properties to it, “It has heard all the words the Lord has said to us.”

2. Another reference to common stones taking on human properties occurs in Matthew 3:9. John the Baptist, while preaching his message of repentance, addresses the Jewish religious hypocrites, (Pharisees and Sadducees), among the crowd.

a) “Don’t think you can escape the wrath of God by saying ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that from these stones God can raise up children for Abraham!”

3. And still another reference came from the Lord himself. Early in the week preceding his passion and death, the Lord instructed two of his disciples where they could find a colt on which he could ride into Jerusalem.

a) As he descended the Mount of Olives, the people spread their clothes along the path for him to ride on.

b) And the whole multitude of his followers began to rejoice and praise God loudly for all the mighty works they had seen Christ do, saying, “Blessed be the King that comes in the name of the Lord.”

4. Of course, some of these same Pharisees among the crowd were not happy with what was unfolding here before their eyes, so they urged the Lord to silence his followers.

a) But Jesus responded instead with, “I tell you that if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out!” (Luke 19:40).

### II. The Doctrine from the Text

A. Doctrine: When Christ breathes his final words, “It is finished,” and gives up the ghost, the rocks in and around Jerusalem respond in a way that infers a near human quality.

1. Our text reads, “the rocks rent.”
  - a) Another translation says, “the rocks split.”
  - b) And those rocks that sealed off the tombs of the dead moved out of the way to allow “many bodies of the saints that slept” and came back to life to come out of their graves!
    - (1) *If only our hearts of stone would willingly respond as these rocks did to the death of their Maker, breaking in two as they witness the passion and death of our most holy Lord.*
2. The Lord is that true Rock of Rephidim, from which flows the water of life, (Exod. 17:6).
  - a) As Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:4, that rock was Christ, out of whom flows living water.
    - (1) *Lord, give me to drink from this fountain that I never thirst again, (John 4:10).*
3. The Lord and Savior, are a rock of offense, (1 Peter 2:8), the Lamb slain from the beginning.
  - a) He was slain (Rev. 5:9), and yet was never more alive than in death.
  - b) “Will you show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee? Shall your lovingkindness be declared in the grave?” (Psa. 88:10-11).
    - (1) *Yes, at his death rocks miraculously split, and, wonder of wonders, dead saints come back to life to praise you!*
  - c) Not only do these dead here rise, but as the text reads, they also appear to many, (Matt. 27:53).
    - (1) *Those who witnessed this most miraculous event must surely have realized the victory he immediately achieved at his death over the power of death and the grave.*
    - (2) *And so Christians are able to say in light of your conquest over death, “O death where is thy sting, O grave where is thy victory?” (1 Cor. 15:55).*

## B. Christ’s Death Tears the Veil of the Temple in Two

1. “And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom,” (Matt. 27:51).
  - a) The sacrificial practices required by God from his people to atone for their sins prior to the death of Christ were originally established as the children of Israel traveled through the wilderness toward Canaan, led by Moses.
    - (1) *God gave explicit instructions regarding the construction of the tabernacle, where all sacrifices were to be made, beginning in Exodus 25:8.*
    - (2) *Every aspect of the tabernacle, as well as its furnishings, typified Christ and God’s plan to atone for sin.*
  - b) The wilderness tabernacle as well as the Jewish temple included three primary divisions – the courtyard, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies – and three veils covered the openings to each of these three divisions in order to separate sinful man from the presence of a holy God.
    - (1) *The first veil opened into the outer courtyard surrounding the tabernacle proper.*
    - (2) *Those bringing their sacrifices could enter the courtyard through this gate.*
    - (3) *Only the priests could enter beyond the next veil covering the Holy Place.*
    - (4) *And only the high priest was allowed to enter beyond the final veil covering the Holy of Holies where God dwelt, and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement.*
2. God accomplishes his will and plans with infinite precision and perfect timing.
  - a) It is possible that no other event in history reveals that to the degree that this particular instance does – the tearing of the veil covering the Holy of Holies.

b) The Bible informs us that the darkening of the sky started at the sixth hour, (see Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:45).

*(1) This is significant, for the sixth hour, (noontime), was the very moment that the high priest Caiaphas, arrayed in his full priestly garments, began the procession in which he would enter the temple to slaughter a pure, spotless Passover lamb.*

c) This darkness that covered the land lasted until the ninth hour — the exact moment the high priest would be making his entrance into the Holy of Holies to offer the blood of the Passover lamb to cover the sins of the nation.

d) It was at this moment that Jesus cried out, “It is finished!” (John 19:30).

*(1) As He heaved upward to breathe for the last time, Jesus gathered enough air to speak forth a victory shout!*

*(2) His assignment was complete!*

*(3) After proclaiming those words with His last ounce of strength, Matthew 27:50 tells us that He “...yielded up the ghost.”*

3. Matthew then writes, “And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom...”

a) The word “behold” stresses the idea of when a thing is specified which is unexpected yet sure, or when a thing is specified which seems impossible and yet occurs.

b) There were two veils inside the temple — one at the entrance to the Holy Place and a second at the entrance to the Holy of Holies.

c) Only the high priest was allowed to pass through the second veil once a year.

d) That second veil was sixty feet high, thirty feet wide, and an entire handbreadth in thickness!

*(1) One early Jewish writing states that the veil was so heavy, it took three hundred priests to move or manipulate it.*

*(2) It would have been impossible humanly speaking to tear such a veil.*

4. At the exact moment Jesus was breathing his last breath on the Cross at Golgotha, Caiaphas the high priest was standing at his station in the inner court of the temple, preparing to offer the blood of a spotless Passover lamb.

a) At the very instant Caiaphas stepped up to kill the Passover sacrifice, Jesus exclaimed, “It is finished!”

b) At that same instant, miles away from Golgotha inside the temple at Jerusalem, an inexplicable, mystifying supernatural event occurred.

c) The massive, fortified veil that stood before the Holy of Holies was suddenly split in half from the top all the way to the bottom!

d) When Jesus was lifted up on that Cross, that Cross became the eternal mercy seat on which the blood of the final sacrifice was sprinkled.

*(1) Once that sacrifice was made, it was no longer necessary for a high priest to continually make sacrifices year after year, for Jesus’ blood had now settled the issue forever!*

*(2) For this cause, God ripped the veil of the temple in half, declaring that the way to the Holy of Holies was now available to everyone who came to Him through the blood of Jesus!*

*(3) This is why the apostle Paul wrote that Jesus “...hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us,” (Ephesians 2:14).*

5. In tandem with the tearing of the veil, Jesus’ death was such a dramatic event that even the earth reacted to it. Matthew 27:51 says, “...the earth did quake, and the rocks rent.”

- a) It is interesting to note that Origen, the early Christian leader, recorded that there were “great earthquakes” at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion.
- b) Although Israel rejected Jesus and the Roman authorities crucified Him, creation always recognized Him!
- c) During His life on this earth, the waves obeyed Him; water turned to wine at His command; fishes and bread multiplied at His touch; the atoms in water solidified so He could walk across it; and the wind ceased when He spoke to it.
- d) So, it should come as no surprise that Jesus’ death was a traumatic event for creation.
- e) The earth shook, trembled, and shuddered at the death of its Creator, for it instantly felt its loss.
- f) The earth shuddered so violently when Jesus died that even “...the rocks rent...”
  - (1) *This was a serious earthquake and even these rocks and quakes should make us realize the incredible significance of the death of Jesus Christ!*

### III. The Text Applied

#### A. Legal Types Done Away With

1. The veil of all those legal types and ceremonies are rent and done away, so that now this the true holy of holies, is no longer to them shadowed, but that now they may look on him better than the people on his shadow.
  - a) Moses (Exod. 34:33) when he then had but talked a while with him, without any other veil then (what the Apostle so calls) his own flesh, here did this Sun of righteousness break forth, and dispel that cloud of figures, (Heb. 10:20).
  - b) Here did the Dayspring from on high visit us, (Mal. 4:2), and chase away those shadows of the night, (Luke 1:78).
  - c) Here’s the way into the heavenly sanctuary opened, here the veil itself makes a fall, and real commentary on that our Savior’s last words, “it is finished,” (John 19:30).
    - (1) *If any ask what is finished, the answer lies in the veil in a way, it rends itself asunder to let us see here finished: the Father’s wrath, the Son’s sufferings, man’s redemption, the devil’s doubts, the priest’s designs, the prophet’s predictions, the expectations of the father’s, the curse, and all ceremonies of the Law.*
    - (a) *It finished the curse of the Moral Law, and use of the Ceremonial law.*
2. He is the true holy of holies, (Exodus 36), so long veiled, and shadowed by types, and figures, but now pervious to the weakest eye of faith in his word and Sacraments, giving us leave to ask him why he so long showed the sun by a candle.
  - a) He showed himself, the true day light, by these weaker glow-worms of legal types.
  - b) Did he envy man’s happiness in knowing him?
    - (1) *Alas, no, it was in that knowledge he made him happy.*
    - (2) *At first, did he need those sacrifices?*
      - (a) *No, all the beasts of the field are his, (Psalm 50:10), and so are the cattle on a thousand hills.*

(b) Rather to confirm the faith by the exact impletion of all those prophetic types of himself, in him, so that if now any un-Israelited Jew has that unseasonable question of John's disciples, still lurking in his heart, "are you he that should come?" (Matt. 11:3), the veil itself of all those shadowed ceremonies that spoke of him, answers in rending itself into that confession of the Centurion, "truly this is the Son of God," (Matthew 15:39).

(3) The devils themselves have now given over that, and confess, (Matthew 4:3), believe, and tremble, (James 2:9).

(4) The Israelite's garments did not wear out and become old in all their journey, until they brought them home to Canaan, (Deut. 8:4), nor has this garment of their Temple but lasted, until it has brought them through the fleeting travail of their figures, to the flowing Canaan of his cross.

c) He tore this veil of types to make way for our faith into him, so that he would tear that fleshy veil of infidelity, of obduracy from our heart, to make way for his grace into it, (2 Cor. 3:15-16).

(1) But did not the barbarous soldiers, Lord, spare his garment whole?

(2) How does it come to pass then that this garment of the Temple escapes no better?

(3) Were he less thrifty, or more cruel to this Temple, then they to his?

(4) No, but in this he has been more merciful to us.

d) This garment of the Law, it was like Adam's fig-leaved pants, (Gen. 3), too short to cover our shame, our sin; like that covering in Isaiah, (28:22 and 59:6), so narrow that we could not wrap us in it.

(1) In that to prevent our trust, did he in this way tear the veil, but his own the emblem of his all-sufficient merit, how mercifully, how providently did he for us keep that whole?

e) Let us not then with the self-saving professor (against his own parable) go about to put a new piece into the old garment, (Luke 5:36), the new piece of our own worked, or bought merit into this old, yet strong garment of his; what need do we have to do that?

(1) It is both whole, and large enough.

(2) Why should we then (as he speaks himself) so, rend and take away from the garment, (Luke 5:36); our tears of sin will so become worse.

(3) What should we so do less, if still patching out this garment with shreds of our own merit?

(4) Then give him the flat lie, and that in those his last words on the cross, telling him to his face, "It is not finished."