

Accompanying Signs of Jesus' Death

Matthew 27:51-56; Mark 15:38-41;

Luke 23:45b and 47-49

At 3 pm on Friday, the fifteenth of Nisan

DIG: What were the **six accompanying signs**? Why was Yeshua's sacrifice necessary to restore the relationship between God and mankind? What was the significance of the torn curtain in the Temple leading into the Most Holy Place at the time of Jesus' death?

REFLECT: What is your impression of these first century **signs**? What signs does God give you today so that you are without excuse (Romans 1:19-20)? How do you feel about the concept of ADONAI as daddy? Does it bother you or make you feel closer to Him? The curtain is torn for you now. How often do you take advantage of your free access to your heavenly Father? Can you explain the significance of Christ's death and resurrection to an unbeliever over coffee? Practice, you may get that chance.

In Messiah and through faith we may approach ADONAI with freedom and confidence (Ephesians 3:12).

Jesus bowed His head. The crown of thorns hangs rigidly. He lapses into unconsciousness. His neck relaxes. His entire body rolls forward, pulling His neck and shoulders away from the cross. Only the nails in His wrists and heels hold Him in place.¹⁶²² **Consequently, there were six accompanying signs of Jesus' death.**

First, at that moment the curtain (Hebrew transliteration: *paroketh*) **of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom** (Matthew 27:51a; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45b). This was the curtain separating the holy place from the most holy place where the ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat were housed in the Jerusalem Temple. Even to this day, much of the ancient Temple format is still seen within the modern synagogue. The Bema (raised platform) is usually the place where the ark is located on the east side of the building in synagogues in the Western world. This is a reminder of the place of the messianic hope, the city of Jerusalem. The modern ark (a large cabinet) contains one or more Torah scrolls. Between the doors of the ark and the scrolls is usually a curtain that is still called a *paroketh*, which reminds us of the enormous curtain in the Holy Temple.

The enormity of **the Temple** and its furnishings is well documented in Jewish literature. We are told that the main *paroketh* before the most holy place was some 60 feet tall and 30 feet wide, made up of four colors (fine linen, blue, scarlet and purple) It was made up of a pattern of 72 squares, and was the thickness of the palm of the hand. **So the statement that it took 300 priests to manipulate the *paroketh* (Tractate Yoma 54a; Ketuvot 106a)** may reflect some artistic exaggeration (but maybe not).¹⁶²³ It was as if **the hands of heaven** had been gripping **the curtain**, waiting for that moment. No delay. No hesitation. **God** has removed the barrier.

Therefore, there is no longer any separation between the believer and the throne of **ADONAI**, as we cry, **"Abba, Father"** (Romans 8:15b). **Abba** is an informal Aramaic term for **Father**, implying intimacy, tenderness, dependence and a complete lack of fear or anxiety. Modern equivalents would be *daddy* or *papa*. Because we now have personal access to **Him**, we can call out *daddy*, just as children do to their earthly fathers. We are **His** adopted children (see **Bw - What God Does For Us at the Moment of Faith**), and have direct access to **God the Father** through **Yeshua ha-Meshiach**.

God accomplished this **reconciliation** on behalf of mankind. When that **curtain** was **torn in two from top to bottom**, it symbolized a change in our relationship where a state of hostility and estrangement was justly replaced by one of peace and fellowship. **For if we were reconciled with God through His Son's death when we were enemies, how much more will be delivered by His life, now that we are reconciled (Romans 5:10 CJB)!**

This does not mean that **God** changes. **ADONAI** has always loved mankind. All **He** needed was a just basis on which to show or display the mercy and love **He** already had. So while it doesn't mean **God** changes, it also does not mean that **God** was already reconciled to us before the cross and that only our attitude needs changing.

Our sin must be dealt with. Unregenerate mankind is **the enemy of God**. **Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God (James 4:4 NLT)**. To believe that **ADONAI** is reconciled to us ignores **His** wrath and misses the real purpose of **the cross**. Atonement and wrath must go hand in hand. **The cross** delivers us from **Divine** wrath, and **we are reconciled with God**.

Reconciliation comes by the death of **Christ**, and it means that our state of alienation from **God** had changed so that now we can be saved. Do you have peace with **God**? If you are a believer, **God** is not angry with you anymore because of your sin. The wrath is not there

anymore. You may displease Him by sinning, but His wrath is not for you. It was taken out on His Son. What an incredible gift. What incredible love! Where do you find that kind of love? Philosophy? People? Other religions? Nowhere but ADONAI. The sin issue has already been dealt with (Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:15-18; Colossians 1:19-22).

Second, there was a tremendous earthquake. The earth shook, the rocks split (Matthew 27:51b). In early writings of the church fathers, Jerome in a *Letter to Hedibia* relates that **the huge beam of the Temple was broken, splintered, and fell.** He connects this with the tearing of the curtain. **The lintel** was part of a gate, and it would seem that the earthquake aided in the breaking it, which was an enormous stone, being at least thirty feet long and weighing some thirty tons!¹⁶²⁴ This **earthquake**, which will be followed by another in **Matthew 28:2**, is a well-known symbol of God's mighty intervention in the affairs of His world (Judges 5:4-5; Psalm 114:4-7), especially in judgment (Jeremiah 10:10; Joel 3:16; Nahum 1:5-6), and it provides the context for the opening of the tombs which follow.¹⁶²⁵

Third, there was a restoration back to physical life. Many bodies of the righteous of the TaNaKh who had recently died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the Holy City and appeared to many people that they knew as a witness (Matthew 27:52-53). Of course this would not be the final resurrection of Jewish believers the end time (see my commentary on **Revelation Fd - The Resurrection of the Righteous of the TaNaKh**), as we continue to wait for the return of the **Mashiach**. Rather, they were temporary resurrections (because they died again sometime later in their lives) like some other others that took place during unusual circumstances in Jewish history. **Elijah raised the son of the Shunammite woman** from the dead (Second Kings 4:8-37), **Rabbi Sha'ul raised Eutychus** who had fallen asleep while sitting in a window and fell three stories to his death (Acts 20:7-12), and **Jesus raised His friend Lazarus** from the dead (John 11:38-44).

Those **righteous of the TaNaKh** did not appear in Jerusalem until after the Lord's own resurrection because **He** was divinely appointed to be **the firstfruits of those who are asleep** (First Corinthians 15:20). And just as **Messiah Himself** only appeared to those who already believed in Him after His resurrection, it would also seem that **the many** who like Abraham had **believed in ADONAI** (Genesis 15:6), only appeared to fellow believers as a testimony to the resurrection of **Christ** and to **God's** promise to raise all of those who put their faith in the **Savior of souls**.

The rabbis themselves never mention the tearing of the curtain of the Temple. They do, however, acknowledge some strange events that did happen in conjunction with the

Temple when Yeshua was crucified. They mention it as being forty years before the destruction of the Temple.

Fourth, the massive doors of the Temple, suddenly and inexplicably, opened by themselves. Both Josephus and the Talmud (a Jewish commentary on the Hebrew Scriptures) mention that the very heavy Temple doors that always took twenty men to open, suddenly and inexplicably opened on their own accord. **Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakki, one of the leading Sadducees of that day said this when he witnessed the opening of those doors: O Temple, O Temple, there is no need for you to say anything. I know that you are destined for destruction (Tractate Yoma 39b).**¹⁶²⁶ What is especially pertinent to these accompanying signs was the mysterious opening of the Temple doors. **The Talmudic rabbis interpreted it as a sign foreshadowing the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.** It was as if the Temple doors, (which were made from cedars from Lebanon) opened themselves to receive the destructive fire of the Romans.

Fifth, there were some unexplainable changes in the Yom Kippur ceremony. Another interesting development had to do with the legend of Azazel. Azazel is the Jewish name for the scapegoat (see my commentary on Exodus 30 - The Days of Atonement). **The rabbis describe some changes in the Yom Kippur ceremony of the two goats (Leviticus 16). Whereas the lot would always come up in the correct way, this changed at the time of Christ's death. Likewise, the crimson strap on the scapegoat, which would normally turn white on Yom Kippur, suddenly ceased to change.**¹⁶²⁷ According to the Jewish writings of this period, a custom developed in which the Jews tied a red ribbon around the scapegoat, which, when it was sent into the wilderness, turned white (**Isaiah 1:18**). They believed that this meant that God had forgiven the sins of Isra'el for that year. The Jewish legend goes on to say that the red ribbon stopped turning white forty years before the destruction of the Temple.¹⁶²⁸

Sixth, there was a sudden mysterious extension of the middle of the seven lights of the golden lampstand in the most holy place (see my commentary on Exodus 25 - The Lampstand in the Sanctuary: Christ the Light of the World). **Josephus told us of this.**¹⁶²⁹

The Gospel writers could not leave the subject without pointing out that even the Roman centurion and the soldiers around him were struck by the uniqueness of Christ's death. **When the centurion who stood there in front of Jesus and those with him who were guarding the Lord saw how He died and the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified. They came to the front of the cross and looked at Him and at the darkened**

sky and the crack across the big rock. **The centurion** bowed his head. **"Surely,"** he exclaimed to the others, **"This was a righteous man and the Son of God"** (Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47). For **Mark**, this was the climax of his revelation of **Yeshua's** identity. This confession by a **Gentile Roman** officer said volumes to his **Gentile Roman** audience. **The centurion** was troubled, and **he** turned to look at the friends and family of **Jesus** - perhaps to ask a question - but **he** saw that they had moved the mother of **the Messiah** back toward the crossroads near the **Garden Gate**. All of them seemed to be weeping.

When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. But all those who knew **Jesus**, including the women who had followed Him from **Galilee** to care for His needs (Luke 8:1-3), stood at a distance, watching these things. Among them were **Mary Magdalene**, **Mary the mother of James and Joseph**, and **Salome**, the mother of **Zebedee's** sons (Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; Luke 23:48-49). It would have been difficult for any woman to get very close to the actual crucifixion area, but evidently this group of loyal Jewish women from **Galilee** stayed as close as they could, while the apostles had fled.

Through those **six accompanying signs** the **Father** was saying that **the cross** is the only hope of eternal life (see **Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer**). When one's sin is carried away by **Christ's** atoning death, the wrath of **God** is appeased for that believer, and he or she is delivered from the death and condemnation that **the Lord** endured on his or her behalf. For those who believe in **the Son**, access to **God** is open wide, and they are assured of living in **His** eternal and indestructible Kingdom in eternal and indestructible bodies.¹⁶³⁰

Rabbi Sha'ul's second prayer in **Ephesians** is followed by this blessing: **Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His powers that is at work within us, to Him be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen** (Ephesians 3:20-21). Remember that **Jesus** has provided you free access to **the heavenly Father**; you can have a private audience with Him twenty-four hours a day for the rest of your life!

*For this reason I come to You, **Abba Father**, from whom **Your** whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of **Your** glorious riches **You** may strengthen me with power through **Your Ruach HaKodesh** within me, so that **the Messiah** can live in my heart through faith. And I pray that I may have power, together with all believers, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep the love of **Christ** is, and to know this love that passes all understanding. My I be filled to the brim with all of **Your** fullness. Amen.*¹⁶³¹