

## A Temple Veil, an Earthquake and a Centurion

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As I have pointed out to my readers a few times before, because of the fact that we Twenty-First Century Christians are far removed from the amazing events which transpired in First Century Jerusalem so long ago, we sometimes acquire a skewed or distorted perspective regarding those same events. Add to that the way in which the Bible was written, and we can become a bit confused. It isn't necessarily intentional on our part, it just seems to happen. Because we were not actually there living and witnessing those events, we may assume in our minds that certain things happened straight in a row -- boom, boom, boom -- when that may not necessarily have been the case whatsoever.

What is not always clear to us today in the Scriptures -- but which was obviously very clear in the original writer's mind -- is that there are often gaps in time between certain events. We may very well read verse one, verse two and verse three, and never even realize that the events which they are describing could have been separated by days, weeks, months, years or perhaps even decades. We need to keep in mind that the Bible is a very compact version of about six thousand years of human history, and, of course, that it primarily centers around the fate of Israel, as well as the destiny of Christ's Church.

This situation can be complicated even further, if the events we are reading about were not written in chronological order. To make matters even more difficult, sometimes certain events are repeated in the same chapter, in the same book, or in another book. This may be because the two instances of that same event may have been written by two different authors, from two very different perspectives, at two different time periods. Other times, an author may simply repeat his account and add new details to it. So as I said, considering all of these various points, it is no wonder that two thousand years later today, we can find ourselves confused regarding exactly what happened, as well as when it happened.

One good example we find in three of the Gospels of the New Testament concerns the tearing -- or renting -- of the Temple veil, and the earthquake which occurred. We find these events mentioned in the following verses:

"Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. 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, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God."

Matthew 27:50-54, KJV

"And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us

see whether Elias will come to take him down. And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God."

Mark 15:36-39, KJV

"And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost. Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man."

Luke 23:44-47, KJV

For those of my readers who may not be very familiar with the veil which is mentioned in the previous verses, it was a thick curtain which separated the outer part of the Temple's interior where the priests usually ministered -- which was called "the holy place" -- from the innermost part of the Temple where the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat were situated, which was called "the most holy place". Actually, God commanded Moses to make the veil -- or "vail" in the Old Testament -- when He first gave him instructions on Mount Horeb -- or Sinai -- regarding how to design and construct the Tabernacle -- or huge tent -- which preceded the Temple, as we see by the following verses:

"And thou shalt make a vail of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work: with cherubims shall it be made: And thou shalt hang it upon four pillars of shittim wood overlaid with gold: their hooks shall be of gold, upon the four sockets of silver. And thou shalt hang up the vail under the taches, that thou mayest bring in thither within the vail the ark of the testimony: and the vail shall divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy. And thou shalt put the mercy seat upon the ark of the testimony in the most holy place."

Exodus 26:31-34, KJV

In later years, when King Solomon built the first Temple, the veil was used for this very same purpose; that is, to separate the holy place from the most holy place. By the

way, in case you are wondering why I do not use the phrase "holy of holies", it is because it is not found anywhere in the King James Version of the Bible. This phrase was in fact a fabrication of men. As you may know, only the high priest was permitted to enter into the innermost part of the Temple one time each year in order to make full atonement -- that is, expiation -- for the sins of the people. This ritual was mandated by God to Moses in the Pentateuch -- that is, in the Torah, meaning the five books of the Law -- during the Old Testament period many centuries earlier.

If you would like to learn a lot more about why God allowed the Temple veil to be torn from top to bottom, I encourage you to read the series called "Is the KJV Bible the Inerrant Word of God?", as well as the series "Once Upon a Time: A True Story". Remember; everything that God does is for a very specific reason; and the Temple veil being torn precisely at the time when Jesus died on a Roman cross was obviously no exception.

Returning our attention to the previous Gospel verses, we can only imagine the shock and horror that some of the unbelieving Jewish religious elders must have experienced when they discovered that the Temple veil had been fully torn from top to bottom, possibly even revealing the most holy place within, which was only for the high priest to see. I can only wonder if they took that incident as a sign from the Lord that their days as the spiritual leaders of Israel were numbered. It seems apparent that Caiaphas the high priest was certainly aware of how very dangerous the situation was becoming. You may recall that he was the one who had said that Jesus needed to die in order to spare Israel from Rome's wrath for a while longer, as we see by the following set of verses:

"Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation;

And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death."

John 11:47-53, KJV

"Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people."

John 18:14, KJV

I am also reminded of the very strong rebuke that Jesus gave to the Pharisees. We find it mentioned in Matthew chapter twenty-three, as well as in Luke chapter thirteen, as we see by the following set of verses:

"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

Matthew 23:33-39, KJV

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

Luke 13:34-35, KJV

As a matter of clarification, when Jesus says "your house" in the previous verses, I believe that He is actually referring

to the Temple in Jerusalem. In most cases, the word "temple" is derived from the Greek words "hieron" and "naos". However, while the Greek word which is used in the previous verses -- "oikos" -- can also refer to a regular house or home, it seems that in this case, it is referring to the Temple -- or house of God -- for a few reasons. First of all, this confrontation with the Pharisees -- as well as the one before it with the Sadducees -- occurred on the Temple grounds. Second of all, right after Jesus finished this rebuke of the Pharisees and the Sadducees in Matthew twenty-three, chapter twenty-four begins with Jesus leaving the Temple, and then telling His immediate followers that not one stone of the Temple will be left upon another, as we see by the verses below. So it was actually a continuation of the rebuke Jesus had delivered within the Temple itself, in my view:

"And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."  
Matthew 24:1-2, KJV

So considering all of the heavy warnings which Jesus had issued to His religious persecutors prior to His death on a Roman cross, I would think that between the Temple veil splitting in two at the time of His death, and the strong earthquake which opened the graves and released the Saints, it would have majorly shocked, surprised and unsettled a lot of people in Jerusalem, and caused them to fear, beginning with the Pharisees and Sadducees themselves, who adamantly refused to believe that Jesus was exactly who He claimed to be. Theirs was a house of cards, built on human traditions, and not on the Word or Spirit of God. Thus, when the winds of God's fierce judgments blew against it, it came crashing down.

If, as I have, you have watched a lot of old movies about the life of Jesus Christ, perhaps you have noticed that both events -- that is, the Temple veil being torn in half, and the earthquake occurring -- are depicted as having happened at the time when Jesus gave up His spirit on the Cross. At first glance, one might erroneously assume that this is how these two events transpired. However, it seems to me that a more careful reading of the previous verses indicates that

Matthew is doing exactly what I shared with you at the very beginning of this article. In other words, he is describing two distinct events which are actually separated by a small gap in time. A casual reading of the Scriptures will not reveal this point.

The first event -- the Temple veil being torn -- occurred right after Jesus died on the Cross, exactly as Matthew informs us. As I mentioned before, there is a very specific reason why the Temple curtain was torn at that particular time. However, even though it is mentioned immediately afterwards in Matthew's account, the second event -- that is, the earthquake -- occurred three days later when the Lord miraculously rose from the dead. If you re-read the verses from both the Gospels of Mark and Luke, you will see that both of them agree with what Matthew writes regarding the timing of the Temple veil being torn.

Luke is even more specific and provides us with additional details which help us to pinpoint when the curtain tore. He mentions the six hours of darkness which occurred during the Crucifixion. He tells us that the Temple veil was rent in the middle. And then he says that Jesus cried out and gave up the ghost. Mark also writes that Jesus cried out, gave up the ghost, and then the Temple veil was torn. So there is no confusion regarding when this event occurred. We have three witnesses confirming it.

However, as I said, even though the Temple veil being torn and the earthquake occurring are mentioned in the very same sentence in Matthew -- a sentence which is actually spread across three short verses -- I do not believe that this is what the Apostle intended for us to understand. Remember that he is writing after-the-fact, and is just giving us a brief rundown of the events. Matthew uses the word "and" a few times in that long sentence to join these two separate events together. In fact, if you have any doubts that this is what the Apostle is doing, then consider that only a few verses later in chapter twenty-eight, Matthew clarifies that the earthquake occurred three days later when Jesus rose from the dead, as we see here:

"In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great

earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it."

Matthew 28:1-2, KJV

Clearly then, in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, the earthquake occurred three days later when Jesus was released from death. This would in fact explain why neither Mark nor Luke mention the earthquake in their accounts. In other words, their concern and emphasis was with what happened on the specific day, and in the very hours, that Jesus died on the Cross. Therefore, they would not include an event which occurred three days later, no matter how major it was. It was indeed major. Have you seen a resurrected Saint lately?

If you still have any doubts regarding this gap in time between these two events, there is actually an easy -- and Scriptural -- way to prove that the temblor occurred three days later at the time of the Lord's Resurrection, and not at the time of Jesus' death on the Cross when the Temple veil was torn. It all comes down to the fact that the Bible very clearly refers to Jesus as "the first begotten of the dead" and "the firstborn among many brethren". This point is made very evident in verses such as the following:

"For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body . . . For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, THAT HE MIGHT BE THE FIRSTBORN among many brethren."

Romans 8:22-23, 29, KJV

"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, AND BECOME THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THEM THAT SLEPT. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."

1 Corinthians 15:19-23, KJV

"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to



be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, THE FIRSTBORN OF EVERY CREATURE . . . And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, THE FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD; that in all things he might have the preeminence."

Colossians 1:12-15, 18, KJV

"To the general assembly and CHURCH OF THE FIRSTBORN, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,"

Hebrews 12:23, KJV

"And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and THE FIRST BEGOTTEN OF THE DEAD, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood . . . I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

Revelation 1:5, 18, KJV

Now, if we truly believe that Jesus is "the first begotten of the dead" and "the firstborn among many brethren" as those verses state, then we are forced to conclude that the other Saints could not have risen from the dead until Jesus did, which was three days after His Crucifixion. If we accept that the temple veil was torn at the time of His death, and that the earthquake occurred at that same time, thus opening the graves and releasing the Saints, then in essence, we have declared that Jesus is not really "the first begotten of the dead" or "the firstborn among many brethren". That is easy enough to see, isn't it? So Jesus was resurrected first, and was then followed by the Saints which are mentioned at the end of the Gospel of Matthew.

As far as I know -- and contrary to what certain Hollywood producers and directors like to show -- an earthquake did not occur at the time that Jesus died on the Cross. None of the Gospel writers state that it did. Sadly, even certain Christian preachers have hopped onto that bandwagon. Prior to his death, one such preacher even claimed that because of an earthquake which supposedly occurred at the time that the Lord died on the Cross, Jesus' blood supposedly fell to the

ground, seeped through a crack, and dripped onto the Ark of the Covenant, which was hidden in a secret vault below the place -- Golgotha, the place of the skull -- where Jesus was crucified. The man who made this particular claim came across to me as being very sincere. However, he also claimed to have actually found, seen and reburied the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem a few decades ago. To be honest, I still don't know what to think of that man.

At any rate, showing an earthquake at that particular point in movies amounts to taking artistic license for the benefit of dramatic effect. I have seen directors do this in so many Bible-related movies, and sometimes it is really ridiculous, even to the point of ruining what could otherwise be a half decent movie. A sad case in point is the 2014 Aronofsky movie "Noah", starring Russell Crowe in the leading role, along with a host of other well-known Hollywood stars. But rock monsters? Oh really? What was Aronofsky thinking? There was also one scene where Noah supposedly wanted to kill one of his daughters-in-law. Anyway, as far as I can tell, most Hollywood honchos have very little respect for God's Word.

The final issue we are going to discuss in this article is the centurion, what he said, and when he said it. If we take the three Gospel accounts at face value, there appears to be somewhat of a contradiction regarding both what was said, as well as when it was said. In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, the centurion says "Truly this was the Son of God" or else "Truly this man was the Son of God", which really amounts to the same thing. However, in the Gospel of Luke, the centurion says "Certainly this was a righteous man." The latter is a very big difference from calling Jesus the Son of God. So what is going on here?

Once again, a much closer examination of the verses which are found in three of the Gospels reveals the truth. As it turns out, it appears that two separate incidents involving a Roman centurion are being described, although I suspect that it may have been the same centurion in both cases. Furthermore, as I explain in my 1997 article entitled "The Mystery of Cornelius the Centurion", I have wondered over the years if this may have been Cornelius the centurion, who was later baptized by the Apostle Peter in Acts chapter ten.

In reading the details which are included in the Gospels of

Mark and Luke, it becomes rather evident that the centurion was present at the time of Jesus' Crucifixion. Both accounts mention Jesus crying out, and both Gospels likewise mention the Temple veil being torn. In Mark it says "the centurion, which stood over against him" -- "him" meaning Jesus -- and in the Gospel of Luke it says "when the centurion saw what was done". The centurion then makes his statement: "Truly this man was the Son of God" or "Certainly this was a righteous man."

I honestly don't know why there is this seeming discrepancy in what the centurion said. In one statement he recognizes that Jesus is the Son of God, while in the other, he appears to be acknowledging that Jesus was an innocent man who did not deserve to die. That these translations are correct is borne out by the original Greek words which are used. In the Gospel of Mark they are "huios theos", or "son god", and in the Gospel of Luke they are "dikaios anthropos"; that is, "righteous man". There are only two possibilities that I can see at this current time: Either one of the Gospel writers got it wrong, or perhaps the centurion actually said both things. Who knows.

However, once again it turns out that the Gospel of Matthew is the most troublesome at first glance. Matthew likewise mentions Jesus crying out, as well as the Temple veil being rent, and then he has the centurion saying "Truly this was the Son of God." As occurs in the Gospel of Mark, the Greek words which are used here are "huios theos", or "son god". But contrary to what you may think, in this instance, these words do not appear to have been spoken by the centurion at the site of Jesus' Crucifixion. Rather, sandwiched in between his mention of Jesus crying out, the veil being born, and the centurion making his statement, Matthew writes the following:

". . . and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God."

Matthew 27:51-54, KJV

So as we discussed earlier, this earthquake occurred three

days later after the Crucifixion. That is when the Saints arose from the dead and went into the city, following Jesus' own Resurrection first. Please notice that it says that they "came out of the graves AFTER HIS RESURRECTION".

I believe that it is Jesus' resurrection that the centurion and his companions are reacting to when they say "Truly this was the Son of God." They had just witnessed the earthquake. They had witnessed an Angel rolling away the stone and then sitting on it. Then, last of all, they witnessed Jesus, alive and well, walking out of the sepulchre and departing. So what else could they have possibly said in such a situation? They were no doubt totally stunned by what they had witnessed. Why else would these military men, who were trained to control their emotions, fear greatly, if they were simply standing at the foot of the cross of a dead man? What is there to fear in that? Let me remind you again of what Matthew wrote:

"And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it."

Matthew 28:1-2, KJV

I don't know for a fact that the Roman soldiers actually saw the Angel. However, I am assuming that they did, because the two Marys saw the Angels as well, and even spoke with them.

Thus, when Matthew writes that they were "watching Jesus", I don't believe that he is saying that they were watching Him die on the Cross. That was three days earlier. I think that it really means that they were watching His grave, as they had been instructed to do by the unbelieving Jewish elders, who feared that the Lord might actually rise from the dead. That word "watching" is derived from the Greek word "tereo". One of its meanings is to guard. In other words, they were guarding Jesus' sealed tomb, because the Jewish elders had received special permission from Pontius Pilate to have Roman soldiers placed at Jesus' tomb site, as we can determine by the following group of verses:

"Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third

day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch."

Matthew 27:62-66, KJV

So the sepulchre was sealed and the watch was set. Then about two days later, we have these hardened Roman soldiers -- who had probably participated in many crucifixions -- witnessing the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, which caused them to fear greatly. As I mentioned before, this very same astonishment, shock and fear must have permeated all of Jerusalem, as her inhabitants suddenly found themselves being visited by some of the Saints of the Old Testament period.

There is one other very important distinction to be made in regards to what Mark and Luke wrote, and what Matthew wrote. Perhaps you have already noticed it. In both cases, Mark and Luke use the singular pronoun "he", because they are writing about the centurion at the Crucifixion site. In contrast, Matthew twice uses the pronoun "they", because he is writing about the centurion and the soldiers who accompanied him on the watch at the actual grave site. So in my mind, the case is settled. Here is that verse again for your consideration:

"Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God."

Matthew 27:54, KJV

In conclusion, from closely examining verses from three of the Gospels, it appears that the exclamation "Truly this was the Son of God" was actually said on two separate occasions: once at the Crucifixion site, and once at Jesus' burial site following His Resurrection from the dead. Furthermore, I suspect that on both occasions, it may have been said by the very same centurion. This man was in charge of a band of one hundred soldiers. Perhaps their work detail from Pilate not only involved the Crucifixion site, but later some of those very same men were assigned to watching Jesus' sepulchre.

If what I have stated is indeed true, it would very easily

explain why this particular centurion was located at both places, and why he had opportunity to say the same thing at both sites. If my theory regarding the identity of Cornelius is correct, this would demonstrate that God had been working in his life long before he accepted Christ in Acts chapter ten. From the time of the Crucifixion and forward, a certain conviction was growing in Cornelius's heart that Jesus truly was and is the Son of God. Thus, despite the fact that he was raised in a very pagan culture which worshipped a plethora of strange gods which came in all sizes and shapes -- please see Romans 1:22-23 -- Cornelius and his family accepted Jesus in Acts chapter ten and were baptized by Peter. What an amazing story of conversion!

With these thoughts I will bring this article to a close. I trust that you have enjoyed it, learned something from it, and I pray that it has been a blessing in your life. If you have an account with Facebook, Twitter or Google+, I would really appreciate if you would take the time to click on the corresponding link that is found on this page. Thank you so very much! May God bless you abundantly!

For additional information, you may want to refer to the list of reading resources below which were also mentioned in this article, or which contain topics which are related to this article. All of these articles are likewise located on the Bill's Bible Basics website:

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