

THE VEIL OF THE TEMPLE IN HISTORY AND LEGEND

DANIEL M. GURTNER*

Among the most profound and puzzling texts in the Synoptic Gospels is the report that at Jesus' death "the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Matt 27:51a; cf. Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45).¹ Interpretations of this event have ranged from the rigidly historical to the hermeneutically fanciful.² From a historical perspective, Bultmann (characteristically) classifies the events surrounding Jesus' death as "pure novelistic motifs."³ From an exegetical perspective, scholars frequently seek clarity from the veil traditions in the book of Hebrews, where the believer's hope lies secure "behind the veil" (τὸ ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπέτασματος; Heb 6:19), which is in the sanctuary (Heb 9:3), and is identified with Christ's flesh (τοῦ καταπέτασματος τοῦτ' ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ; Heb 10:20). The term for this "veil" (καταπέτασμα) occurs only six times in the NT, three in the Synoptic rending texts, and three in the respective Hebrews citations. Though the term, as used in the NT, most certainly refers to the inner veil before the holy of holies,⁴ neither the evangelists nor the author of Hebrews provide any description of the veil within the Herodian temple which stood in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' death. Yet within Jewish, Christian, and even secular literature there are rich traditions of history and legend pertaining to this otherwise enigmatic article of cultic worship from antiquity.

I. THE VEIL OF THE TEMPLE IN HISTORY

The Herodian temple building (ναός), modeled after that of Solomon, in which the curtain hung (καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ), was surrounded by a massive series of outer courts (of priests, Israelites, and women respectively). Together these comprise the entire complex (ἱερόν) of nearly 40 acres, though a strict distinction between ναός and ἱερόν cannot always be maintained.⁵ Within the temple (ναός), or "sanctuary," hung a series of curtains which have been the subject of some scholarly discussion. Scholars have debated how many curtains there were and how they were configured with respect to a set of

* Dan Gurtner is assistant professor of New Testament at Bethel Seminary, 3949 Bethel Drive, St. Paul, MN 55112.

¹ The differing order in Luke and the variations between Mark and Matthew are immaterial for our purposes.

² For a recent survey of the varying interpretations of the rending of the veil, cf. Daniel M. Gurtner, "The Rending of the Veil: A Look Back and a Way Forward," *Them* 29 (2004) 4–14.

³ Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. J. Marsh; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963) 282.

⁴ Cf. Daniel M. Gurtner, "LXX Syntax and the Identity of the NT Veil," *NovT* 47 (2005) 344–53.

⁵ So also O. Michel, "Ναός," *TDNT* 4.884–85 n. 19.

doors (cf. *b. Suk.* 7b). A capable evaluation of the evidence is provided by Harry E. Faber van der Meulen,⁶ who begins with Josephus's description of the Solomonic temple and shows how the ancient historian relates a tradition that Solomon "set doors of cedar" (θύρας ἐπέστησε κεδρίνας) in the temple, separating the holy from the most holy place (*Ant.* 8.3.3 §72). These doors, then, were covered with curtains (καταπέτασματα), as was the door to the holy place (*Ant.* 8.3.3 §75), even though later Josephus mentions but a single veil (καταπέτασμα; πρὸ τοῦ καταπετάσματος τοῦ ἁδύτου; *Ant.* 8.3.7 §90) in front of the holy of holies. Allegedly the doors, set up by Solomon behind the veil (*Ant.* 8.3.3 §§72–75), were taken down by Hezekiah and given to the king of Assyria as tribute (2 Kgs 18:16; *b. Ber.* 10b; *b. Pes.* 56a).⁷

With respect to Herod's temple, Faber van der Meulen rightly notes that Josephus mentions but a single veil (καταπέτασμα; *J.W.* 5.5.5 §219) before a set of doors which serve as the "gate opening into the building" and entrance to the holy of holies:

... it had golden doors fifty-five cubits high and sixteen broad. Before these hung a veil (καταπέτασμα) of equal length, of Babylonian tapestry (Βαβυλωνίος ποικιλτὸς), with embroidery of blue and fine linen, of scarlet also and purple, wrought with marvelous skill. Nor was this mixture of materials without its mystic meaning: it typified the universe. For the scarlet seemed emblematical of fire, the fine linen of the earth, the blue of the air, and the purple of the sea; the comparison in two cases being suggested by their colour, and in that of the fine linen and purple by their origin, as the one is produced by the earth and the other by the sea. On this tapestry was portrayed a panorama of the heavens,⁸ the signs of the Zodiac excepted. . . . The innermost recess measured twenty cubits, and was screened in like manner from the outer portion by a veil (καταπέτασμα). In this stood nothing whatever: unapproachable, inviolable, invisible to all, it was called the Holy of Holies. (*J.W.* 5.5.4 §211–5.5 §219 LCL)⁹

With each door being 55 cubits in height and 16 in width (*J.W.* 5.5.4 §211), the veil was of equal size. Some have presumed Josephus's doors here are the same as those in *J.W.* 5.5.4 §202. These, he says, were 30 by 15 cubits, though elsewhere they were 60 high by 20 broad and required 200 men to close them every day (*Ap.* 2.1.9 §119). Josephus also speaks of doors "covered with variegated veils" (ἐμπετάσματα; *Ant.* 15.11.3 §394; cf. *Ant.* 12.5.4 §250),¹⁰ though it does not seem entirely clear that in the latter reference he is speaking of the holy of holies.

⁶ Harry E. Faber van der Meulen, "One or Two Veils in front of the Holy of Holies," *ThEv* 18 (1985) 22–27.

⁷ Tim Hegg, "Separating the Most Holy from the Holy: The 'Veil' in the Tabernacle and First and Second Temples" (paper presented at the Northwest Regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Portland, OR, March 4, 2000) 10.

⁸ Though Philo thought this of the golden menorah (*Quaest. Ex.* 2.73, 81, 95). So David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5* (WBC 52a; Dallas: Word, 1997) 90.

⁹ Cf. also *Ep. Arist.* 84–85. For a discussion of some of Josephus's use of terms in his account of the Exodus tabernacle and Herodian temple, cf. André Pelletier, "Le 'Voile du Temple' de Jérusalem en termes de métier," *RSG* 77 (1964) 70–75.

¹⁰ Cf. also André Pelletier, "Le grand rideau du vestibule du Temple de Jérusalem," *Syria* 35 (1958) 226; Raymond Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1994) 2.1112.

Josephus occasionally betrays self-contradictions in his work,¹¹ particularly in the temple accounts.¹² Moreover, he also contradicts details of the temple description in the Mishnaic tractate *Middot*.¹³ Yet scholars have found ways to account for such contradictions. Levine, for example, postulates that Josephus describes the Herodian temple at two different times. The former refers to it as it was when destroyed in AD 70, the latter as it was when initially built c. 20 BC. He suggests all the discrepancies between Josephus's accounts are explained by the extensive renovations undertaken between the completion of the initial phase of the construction (c. 10 BC) and the temple's destruction in AD 70. Yet Josephus mentions no such chronological distinction, and perhaps Levine could be charged with exaggerating the renovations and minimizing Josephus's contradictions.¹⁴

Gösta Lindeskog suggests that the plurality of veils mentioned by Josephus presumes the two veils called *מִסְכָּה* and *פֶּרֶכֶת* respectively are in view.¹⁵ This is challenged by Faber van der Meulen, who contends the reference to more than one *פֶּרֶכֶת* in *m. Tam. 7:1* demands that at least two veils were present in front of the holy of holies, as *פֶּרֶכֶת* is a term used exclusively of this curtain. Yet Faber van der Meulen too quickly passes over Lindeskog's objection without demonstrating from Mishnaic texts that *פֶּרֶכֶת* always refers to the inner veil as it does in MT texts. Indeed, the *פֶּרֶכֶת* in *m. Tam. 7:1* is presumably the outer veil, because no priests were permitted within the holy of holies, if that veil were in view, to push aside the inner veil for the High Priest (Lev 16:17). Similarly looking for an explanation of the two-veil tradition in Semitic texts, Faber van der Meulen looks to the occurrence of the plural *פֶּרֶכֶת* twice in the Qumran Temple Scroll (11Q19 7:13, 14) for support of the two-veil hypothesis. Such speculation is dubious, at least, because the Qumran texts to which he refers are badly fragmented and the context in which those references occur likely refers to a future, earthly temple, of which the relation to the then current Jerusalem temple is unclear. Simon Légasse suggests the most plausible explanation for the origin of a two-veil tradition comes from the close association between the Hebrew *פֶּרֶכֶת* ("inner veil") and its Akkadian cognate, *parakku*.¹⁶ He shows that the expression "between

¹¹ Carol Meyers attributes them to gross exaggeration ("Temple, Jerusalem," *ABD* 6.365); cf. Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 23. For a more complete treatment of the historiographical issues involved, cf. Shaye J. D. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome: His Vita and Development as a Historian* (Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition 8; Leiden: Brill, 1979) 3–23, esp. 7–8.

¹² Lee I. Levine, "Josephus' Description of the Jerusalem Temple: *War*, *Antiquities*, and Other Sources," in *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period: Essays in Memory of Morton Smith* (ed. F. Parente and J. Sievers; Studia Post-Biblica 41; Leiden: Brill, 1994) 234–35. Cf. Richard J. Bauckham, "Josephus' Account of the Temple in *Contra Apionem* 2.102–109," in L. H. Feldman and J. R. Levison, eds., *Josephus' Contra Apionem: Studies in its Character and Context with a Latin Concordance to the Portion Missing in Greek* (AGAJU 34; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 327–47.

¹³ James C. VanderKam, *An Introduction to Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) 202.

¹⁴ Levine, "Josephus' Description" 235.

¹⁵ Gösta Lindeskog, "Vorhang," in *Biblisch-historisches Handwörterbuch* (ed. B. Reicke and L. Rost; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966) 3.2119.

¹⁶ Simon Légasse, "Les voiles du temple de Jérusalem: Essai de parcours historique," *RB* 87 (1980) 580. Cf. Daniel M. Gurtner, "The 'Atonement Slate' or the 'Veil'? Notes on a Textual Variant in Exod. XXVI 34," *VT* 54 (2004) 396–98.

the curtains” “designated the first station of the statue of the god” in the Babylonian temple to Marduk at Uruk.¹⁷ Yet this notion that the plurality implied by the term may have contributed to the tradition seems to split hairs over a lexical item not addressed by the rabbis, who are otherwise more than capable of hair-splitting!¹⁸ Faber van der Meulen speculates that the term פֶּרֶכֶת should be present in three locations (1 Kgs 6:31, 33; 7:50 [LXX 7:36]), following Wilhelm Rudolf¹⁹ and others, to open the possibility of an additional veil, though this view is not widely accepted.²⁰

Some have taken Josephus’s reference to multiple veils to inform their readings of rabbinic texts, where a double veil is affirmed. The Mishnah (*m. Yoma* 5:1), for example, speaks of the high priest, on the Day of Atonement, going

through the Sanctuary until he came to the space between the two curtains separating the Sanctuary from the Holy of Holies. And there was a cubit’s space between them. R. Jose (c. 135–170) says: Only one curtain was there, for it is written, *And the veil shall divide for you between the holy place and the most holy* (Exod 26:33). The outer curtain was looped up on the south side the inner one on the north side. (Danby)²¹

A double veil of the sort the Mishnah describes could very well be described as “the veil” (singular), especially as the arrangement could mean that only the outer one was normally visible from the holy place. Yet it is unclear whether R. Jose’s statement is intended to speak just of the tabernacle, to which his citation of Exod 26:33 refers, or/and to the Herodian temple. If the latter, R. Jose’s statement betrays a common rabbinic practice of depending on the prescriptive texts particularly of the Torah (though also Ezekiel) rather than a descriptive account of the historical temple. Thus he asserts a number of years after the destruction of the temple that there *must* have

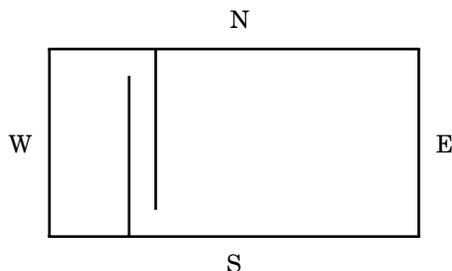
¹⁷ Légasse, “Les voiles” 580. Further discussion of the historical origin of veils in the temple is summarized by Otfried Hofius, *Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes: Eine exegetisch-religions-geschichtliche Untersuchung zu Hebräer 6,19f. und 10,19f.* (WUNT 14; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1972) 17–19. See also Hugo Odeberg, *3 Enoch or The Hebrew Book of Enoch* (Cambridge: University Press, 1928) 2.141; G. W. MacRae, *Some Elements of Jewish Apocalyptic and Mystical Tradition and their Relation to Gnostic Literature* (Diss. Phil., Cambridge University, 1966) 2.28; Hans Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum* (WUNT 2; Tübingen: Mohr, 1951) 73–74. Theodor Klauser, “Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes,” *JAC* 3 [1960] 141–42) looks to the Persian practice of maintaining a separation between the king and his subjects. Adolf Büchler (“Die Erlösung Eliša b. Abujahs aus dem Höllenfeuer,” *MGWJ* 76 [1932] 412–56) suggests the idea comes from the Roman court practice, according to which the judge himself sits behind a veil and advises.

¹⁸ Légasse, “Les voiles” 585. Cf. Adam Falkenstein, *Topographie von Uruk* (Leipzig: Harrasowitz, 1941) 1.21; T. A. Busink, *Der Tempel von Jerusalem von Salomo bis Herodes* (SFSMD 3; Leiden: Brill, 1970) 206, n. 132; F. Thureau-Dangin, *Rituels accadiens* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1921) 49–50 n. 14, 94 n. 6, 104 n. 1; Wolfram von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (3 vols.; Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1972) 2.1230; Hans Bauer and Pontus Leander, *Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache des Alten Testaments* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1918–22) 8–9, 15–16.

¹⁹ Wilhelm Rudolf, *Chronikbücher* (HAT; Tübingen: Mohr, 1955) 204.

²⁰ Faber van der Meulen, “One or Two Veils” 23 and 27 n. 1. Moreover, some texts he cites (esp. p. 25) from Second Temple texts in support of his thesis clearly refer to the tabernacle, not the Herodian temple. Cf. Légasse, “Les voiles” 580–81.

²¹ Légasse (“Les voiles” 580–81) judges this “a fictive description.” Cf. Brown, *Death* 2.1111, n. 27.



been but one veil for no other reason than that the Exodus instructions stipulate it. If this Mishnah text is describing the cult of the Herodian temple, then it describes these *two* curtains as forming a corridor one cubit in width, with access to the corridor coming from the left (south) side and from the corridor to the holy of holies on the right (north) side,²² as Faber van der Meulen's diagram²³ illustrates. The Tosephta preserves a near-identical tradition (*t. Yoma* 3:4–5), though it explicitly states that Solomon's temple is in view. Yet the tradition is clearly in favor of the Herodian temple elsewhere, where the presence of two veils (פרכות) in front of the holy of holies is recounted (*Sifre Deut.* §328 [on *Deut* 32:38]).

Where did the double-veil tradition originate? Faber van der Meulen rightly indicates:

The rabbis did not know precisely whether the dividing wall was to be built as part of the space of the holy of holies, the length of which was 20 (cubits), or whether the dividing wall was to be included in the 40 (cubits) of the holy place. The measurements of both sections of the temple building were carefully prescribed (1 *Kgs* 6:16ff). The sphere of the dividing wall would have caused a diminishing of the 20 or 40 (cubits) and this would have meant that either the holy place or the holy of holies would have been shorter in length than holy tradition prescribed.²⁴

For this reason, it seems, the double veil tradition consisting of two curtains was created to account for the intervening space of one (cubit) between the holy place and the holy of holies. Indeed, in *b. B. Bat.* 3a, where a wall in place of a veil is recorded, the rabbis reveal the technical difficulty in constructing such a configuration. They conclude tradition suggests that it is equally acceptable to hang two veils, with one cubit of space in between, in place of one "dividing wall,"²⁵ presumably one cubit thick. Hegg concurs: "the

²² Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933) 167, n. 7.

²³ Taken from Faber van der Meulen, "One or Two Veils" 25.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 25–26. So also Hegg, "Separating the Most Holy from the Holy" 9–10. Cf. *m. Mid.* 4:7; *m. Yoma* 5:1; *b. Yoma* 51b; James A. Montgomery, *The Books of Kings* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951) 158.

²⁵ For a discussion of the dividing wall, see Joseph Hellerman, "Purity and Nationalism in Second Temple Literature: 1–2 Maccabees and *Jubilees*," *JETS* 46 (2003) 405; M. Clermont-Ganneau, *Le Dieu Satrape et Les Phéniciens dans le Péloponèse* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1878) 56–60; C. Schneider, "μεσότοιχον," *TDNT* 4.625; *Eph* 2:14.

sages could not agree as to what level of holiness the cubit span of the wall consisted of in Solomon's Temple."²⁶ The space between, then, was considered to be on the level of sanctity of neither the holy place nor the holy of holies (*m. Mid.* 4:7; *m. Yoma* 5:1; *b. Yoma* 51b).²⁷

A chart should help organize the evidence:

DISPARATE EVIDENCE FOR THE VEIL CONFIGURATIONS IN JEWISH TEMPLES

Solomonic Temple

Doors in front of the holy of holies (1 Kgs 6:31; 2 Chr 4:22 θύρα; דלתות; cf. *b. Yoma* 52b)

Two pine doors; seem also to be before the holy of holies (1 Kgs 6:34 θύρα; דלת)

Doors in front of the holy of holies (1 Kgs 7:50 [LXX 7:36 θύρα; דלתות])

Single curtain before the holy of holies (Exod 26:33; 2 Chr 3:14; Josephus, *Ant.* 8.3.7 §90 καταπέτασμα; פרכת)

Wooden wall with doors in front of the holy of holies which were "curtained" (ὑφασιν; Josephus, *Ant.* 8.3.3 §72)

Veils in front of the door to the holy place and holy of holies (καταπετάσματα; *Ant.* 8.3.3 §75)

Zerubbabel's Temple

Veils mentioned; unsure if means two in front of holy of holies (καταπέτασμα; 1 Macc 4:51)

Single veil mentioned; uncertain which one (καταπέτασμα; 1 Macc 1:22)

Veils taken by Antiochus Epiphanes (καταπετάσματα; Josephus, *Ant.* 12.5.4 §250)

Ezekiel's Temple

Doors before the holy of holies and holy place; no veil mentioned (Ezek 41:23; θύρα; דלתות)

Herodian Temple

Single veil (mentioned) in front of the holy of holies (door implied from *J.W.* 5.5.4 §212; καταπέτασμα *J.W.* 5.5.5 §219; *m. Scheq.* 5:1, 2; 8:4; *m. Men.* 3:6; *m. Mid.* 1:1; *m. Tam.* 7:1?)

Doors covered with "variegated veils" (*Ant.* 15.11.3 §394)

Two veils in front of the holy of holies (*m. Yoma* 5:1, 4?; *t. Yoma* 3:4; cf. *b. B. Bat.* 3a, b; *b. Yoma* 51b) pierced by Titus after his conquest (*Sifre Deut.* §328 [on Deut 32:18])

²⁶ Hegg, "Separating the Most Holy from the Holy" 9. Cf. *b. Yoma* 51b–52a.

²⁷ Hegg, "Separating the Most Holy from the Holy" 9. Interestingly, Hegg further comments that this "transitional space" was called טַרְקִיָּן, taken by Marcus Jastrow (*A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* [2 vols.; London: Shapiro, Vallentine & Co., 1926] *ad loc.*) as a transliteration of τράραξις, from τράραξις ("confusion"), for the "sages were not able to resolve whether the space should have been taken from the הכּל or the רבּיר." Later rabbis, he continues, considered the space more sacred than that of the holy place, but less than that of the holy of holies. The OT text which seems to have initiated the confusion (1 Kgs 6:17) was included in a list of five texts found in *b. Yoma* 52b for which "the grammatical construction is undecided" (cf. *m. Yoma* 5:1f; *b. Yoma* 42b).

Perhaps it is not unfair to suggest that the capable work of each scholar discussed above gives uncritical credence to their favored sources.

Not all these sources should be treated with equal weight. Légasse insists that the rabbis, particularly here in *Middot*, are dependent on the vision of Ezekiel (41:24) rather than tradition and memory.²⁸ Of course, the rabbis tend to assume that the Herodian temple conformed to the Exodus tabernacle. But this means we should presumably take more seriously as possibly historical information about the Temple that *cannot* be derived from the Bible. The suggestions of Légasse²⁹ and L. H. Vincent,³⁰ however, that behind Mishnaic presentations of the temple stands an exegetical tradition that sought to idealize the sanctuary in anticipation of eschatological restoration poses a significant obstacle to this presumption and suggests such texts must be read with caution. Building on the work of T. A. Busink³¹ and Vincent,³² E. P. Sanders provides a capable evaluation of these sources, arguing that of the three texts to which we look for these accounts, Josephus, *Ant.* 15.11.5 §410–20, *J.W.* 5.5.1 §184–5.5.6 §227, and *m. Middot*, *Jewish Wars* 5 is to be preferred where there is disagreement. For Josephus's presence at the assault of Jerusalem means that we must give his testimony serious consideration.³³ Also, his status as a Jerusalem priest means that he was very familiar with the Temple. Sanders argues in favor of *Jewish Wars* 5 for four reasons:

1. The differences between *Middot* and Josephus's accounts normally occur because the former depends on the biblical description of the non-Herodian temples of Solomon and Ezekiel (*m. Mid.* 2:1; cf. Ezek 42:20). For example, there was likely no ark in the Herodian temple (Josephus, *J.W.* 5.5.5 §219; *b. Men.* 27b), though *m. Sheq.* 6:1–2 and *m. Yoma* 5:1 clearly see it present.³⁴
2. *Middot's* account of the temple lacks description of Herod's magnificent porticoes, which, though a feature of pagan temple architecture, nonetheless are attested both by Josephus and by archaeological evidence as a feature of the Jerusalem temple. Busink has argued that the post-70 rabbi responsible for this tractate deliberately omitted this feature from his description so as to dissociate the structure from pagan temples. It is possible that the rabbis were not aware of such architectural features in the Herodian temple and looked to Ezekiel's temple (Ezek 40:18; 42:3, 5) for their account.³⁵ Yet it seems ideological issues have clouded descriptive objectivity.

²⁸ Légasse, "Les voiles" 578–79: "cette vue repose non sur un souvenir véhiculé par la tradition mais sur le texte d'Ézéchiél."

²⁹ Ibid. Cf. Fearghas Ó Fearghail, "Sir 50,5–21: Yom Kippur or the Daily Whole-Offering?" *Bib* 59 (1978) 310.

³⁰ L. H. Vincent, "Le temple hérodien d'après la Mišnah," *RB* 61 (1954) 417.

³¹ Busink, *Der Tempel* 1529–74

³² Vincent, "Le temple hérodien" 5–35, 398–418; E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: SCM, 1992) 499, n. 34.

³³ Mathias Delcor, "Is the Temple Scroll a Source of the Herodian Temple?" in *Temple Scroll Studies* (ed. G. J. Brooke; JSPSS 7; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989) 78.

³⁴ Légasse, "Les voiles" 581–82, though cf. *m. Yoma* 5:2.

³⁵ Sanders, *Judaism* 499, n. 35. Cf. Vincent, "Le temple hérodien" 407.

3. Busink has further shown the feasibility of the *Jewish Wars* 5 account. He shows the archaeological support for Josephus's description of the columns of the temple portico, which "inclines one to think that he also described the rest of the temple correctly."³⁶
4. Finally, Sanders argues that as the Roman assault nears Jerusalem Josephus's description of it improves.³⁷ Having carefully studied the dimensions of the cities, the Romans documented their data to which Josephus and his assistants would have had access in writing *Jewish Wars*. For *Antiquities*, however, Josephus relied on his memory, which, being twenty years later, was far less reliable than the original documents themselves.³⁸

While a great deal of speculation rests on the fourth point, we are generally convinced of Sanders's reliance on *Jewish Wars* 5. Arguments such as those of M. Avi-Yonah³⁹ which contend that the rabbis were more accurate in their description of the Herodian temple's inner sanctum fail to recognize the intense dependence of these texts on the Pentateuch rather than history from the Herodian period. Yet some have conjectured that while Josephus describes the Herodian temple, Mishnaic texts refer to the temple of the Hasmonean era⁴⁰ or that of Zerubbabel.⁴¹ Such distinctions, though, are difficult to prove and not widely accepted. If we follow *Jewish Wars* 5, then we are left to conclude that both the holy place and the holy of holies were screened by a single veil each (καταπέτασμα; *J.W.* 5.5.4 §212; 5.5.5 §219). Yet are we to presume that the inner sanctuary had doors because Josephus says it was covered "in like manner" (ὁ' ὁμοίως) from the outer one? The most natural way to take this text seems to presume not. The text reads that "the innermost recess . . . was screened in like manner from the outer portion by the veil," suggesting the point of similarity between the inner and outer sanctuaries' screening was its veil, with no mention of doors in *J.W.* 5.5.5 §219. While it is difficult to be overly confident about this conclusion, it seems to make the most sense of the evidence.

³⁶ Sanders, *Judaism* 59.

³⁷ Norman Bentwich, *Josephus* (JPS: Philadelphia, 1914) 121–23; Adolf Schlatter, *Zur Topographie und Geschichte Palästinas* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1893); Colonel Conder, *Tent Work in Palestine: A Record of Discovery and Adventure* (New York: Appleton, 1878); Sanders, *Judaism* 59 and 499–500, n. 36.

³⁸ Admittedly, the use of Roman notebooks is well documented (cf. Sanders, *Judaism* 500, n. 39), but Sanders's reconstruction is speculative. Cf. also Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome* 9.

³⁹ M. Avi-Yonah, "The Second Temple," in *Sepher Yerushalayim* (ed. M. Avi-Yonah; Jerusalem: Bialik, 1956) 396–97 [Hebrew].

⁴⁰ Y. Magen, "The Gates of the Temple Mount according to Josephus and the Mishnah," *Cathedra* (1980) 47–53 [Hebrew].

⁴¹ B. Z. Luria, "The Temple Mount Precincts," *Beth Mikra* 13 (1968) 14 [Hebrew]; J. Brand, "Concerning an Article on the Second Temple," *Tarbiz* 29 (1960) 212, 216 [Hebrew]; cf. L. H. Feldman, "Josephus and the Roman Empire as Reflected in The Jewish War" in *Josephus, Judaism and Christianity* (ed. L. H. Feldman and G. Hata; Leiden: Brill, 1987) 42–43; Levine, "Josephus' Description" 236.

II. THE VEIL OF THE TEMPLE IN LEGEND

A number of fascinating legends regarding this veil have passed through Jewish, Christian, and even secular traditions. On the Day of Atonement the high priest was to bring blood into the Holy Place and “sprinkle” (הזיה) it seven times “before the Lord” in front of the “curtain of the sanctuary” (or “holy curtain,” אַת פני פרכת הקדש; Lev 4:6). Though some scholars today debate whether the blood sprinkled toward the veil in the sin offering actually touched the veil (*b. Yoma* 57a; *y. Yoma* 5:4),⁴² the rabbis assumed that, “When he sprinkled the drops were not to reach the curtain, but if they did, they just did” (*b. Yoma* 57a; cf. *m. Yoma* 5:4). Though this did not defile the veil, as blood used cultically only “purifies and sanctifies” (Lev 16:19; only blood spilled illicitly defiles; Num 35:33–34),⁴³ the veil would from time to time contract uncleanness. The degree of cleansing required to rectify the problem depended on the degree of uncleanness: “If the veil [of the Temple] contracted uncleanness from a derived uncleanness, it may be immersed within [the Temple Court] and forthwith brought in again; but if from a primary uncleanness, it must be immersed outside” (*m. Sheq.* 8:4; cf. *b. Hul.* 90b; the context does not clarify the nature of the uncleanness acquired⁴⁴). Eleazar officiated over care of all the temple “hangings” (Neusner; *m. Sheq.* 5:1, 2, better “curtains” or “veils”; *y. Sheq.* 5, 49a, 18), but the veil was preeminent among them. According to *Exod. Rab.* 50:4 (on Exod 36:35), “Three hundred priests had to perform its ritual bath. The priests used to descend into the ritual bath and dip the veil therein, the bath being outside [the temple enclosure]. When they came out of the bath with the veil, they spread it out [to dry] in the *ḥel*” (a place within the fortification of the temple; *m. Mid.* 1:5; *b. Sanh.* 88b). After it was immersed outside, it was to be “spread out on the rampart,” which Herbert Danby identifies as the *Khel* (*m. Mid.* 2:3) marking the boundary of the outermost court (*m. Kel.* 1:8).⁴⁵ This would allow it to dry and fulfill the requirement that it must await sunset to be wholly clean (Lev 11:32). If it is new, it should be spread out on the roof of the portico (see *m. Pes.* 1:5; *m. Suk.* 4:4), “that the people may see how fine is the craftsmanship thereof” (*m. Sheq.* 8:4).⁴⁶

⁴² Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16* (ABC 3; New York, 1991) 234.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 749.

⁴⁴ David Instone-Brewer, in personal conversation, insists that the outer veil must be in view here because the inner could not have contracted uncleanness and would not be on display for public viewing.

⁴⁵ Danby, *Mishnah* 161, n. 8.

⁴⁶ L. Ginzberg (*The Legends of the Jews* [7 vols.; trans. H. Szold and P. Radin; Philadelphia: JPS, 1936–1947] 3.159, n. 335) claims, “During the festivals of the pilgrimage the priests used to raise the curtain from the Holy of Holies to show the pilgrims how much their God loved them as they could see in the embrace of the two Cherubim.” Yet the texts he cites to support this notion (cf. *b. B. Bat.* 99a; *b. Yoma* 54a, b; *Tg. Onq.* Exod 25:20; *Tg. Yer. I* Exod 25:20; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.6.4 §§122–33) say nothing of such a tradition. Cf. Roger D. Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus: Three Early Palestinian Jewish Christian Gospel Haggadoth* (SFSHJ 105; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994) 109ff.

The veil was reportedly “one handbreadth in thickness” (*Exod. Rab.* 50:4 [on *Exod* 36:35]; *m. Sheq.* 8:4–5; *Num. Rab.* 4:13 [on *Num* 4:5])⁴⁷ and, if Josephus is to be trusted on this point, 55 cubits high by 16 wide (about 82.5 feet by 24 feet; *J.W.* 5.5.4 §211).⁴⁸ Its dimensions were to “remain one and the same forever, just as the one anointing of the Tabernacle’s vessels will endure forever” (*Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 1:6; cf. *Num* 7:1). It “was woven in seventy-two threads” (*Exod. Rab.* 50:4 [on *Exod* 36:35]) or “was woven on [a loom having] seventy-two rods,⁴⁹ and over each rod were twenty-four threads”⁵⁰ (*m. Sheq.* 8:5); there were “no knots in the threads” (*Exod. Rab.* 50:4 [on *Exod* 36:35]). While some traditions maintain it was “made by eighty-two young girls,” textual variations read “at a cost of 82 myriad (*denars*)” (cf. *b. Hul.* 90b; cf. *m. Sheq.* 8:5; *b. Tam.* 29a, b).⁵¹ *T. Sheq.* 2:6 presumes women made the curtains and their salary was taken either from the “heave-offerings of the [*sheqel*-] chamber” or, according to Rab Huna (d. 297), from a “fund for temple reparations” (*y. Sheq.* 4, 48a, 2; there is some dispute as to which). There was a “Chamber of the Curtain” that was supposed to be the place where they wove the veil of the holy of holies (*m. Mid.* 1:1; cf. *m. Sheq.* 8:5), though its location is unknown. A tradition from the *Protevangelium of James* (10:2) recounts a council of priests calling for the making of the veil for the temple of the Lord (καταπέτασμα τῷ ναῷ Κυρίου) and reports that Mary herself had, as a child, woven the veil of the temple that was torn, and “[W]hen a needle accidentally pricked her finger, she was given a foretaste of the pain she would feel at the crucifixion.”⁵² Regardless of the historicity

⁴⁷ I am unable to verify the tradition that suggests an ox tied to either end of the veil could not tear it from a primary source. The only reference I have been able to find is secondary: “[the veil was] of so durable a texture, that according to a Jewish writer, it would have required the strength of a yoke of oxen pulling in opposite directions to rend it apart” (George C. Needham, *The True Tabernacle: A Series of Lectures on the Jewish Tabernacle* [Philadelphia: Grant, Faires & Rodgers, 1879] 99). Unfortunately, Needham does not cite any references.

⁴⁸ For discussion of the dimensions of the curtain, see Pelletier (“Le grand rideau” 218–26), who depicts the outer veil as a huge linen draw-curtain in an entrance to the temple courts, a curtain that was 90 feet high (whence the significance of “from top to bottom”). Légasse (“Les voiles” 570) claims the way the curtain was hung was “well known in antiquity, which practiced it, for example, for the theater curtains, hung similarly to columns and unhooked to the moment of representation.” Cf. Daniel M. Gurtner, “Καταπέτασμα: Lexicographical and Etymological Considerations to the Biblical ‘Veil,’” *AUSS* 42 (2004) 105–11; Ó Fearghail, “Sir 50,5–21” 308–9, n. 22; M. Maimonides, *Mishnah Torah* (London: Pelham Richardson, 1838) VIII, 1.4.2; Heinrich Laible, “Der zerrissene Tempelvorhang und die eingestürzte Obenschwelle des Tempeleingangs vom Talmud bezeugt,” *NKZ* 35 (1924) 287–317; Hersh Goldwurm, *Seder Moed Vol. III: Yoma in The Artscroll Mishnah Series: A New Translation with a Commentary* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1980) 81–82.

⁴⁹ A variant reads, “woven on seventy-two strands.” Danby, *Mishnah* 161, n. 10.

⁵⁰ A variant reads, “each strand was of twenty-four threads.” Danby, *Mishnah* 161, n. 11.

⁵¹ Other manuscripts read “it was made by eighty-two maidens” or “the cost of it was eighty-two myriads of *denars*.”

⁵² Howard Clarke, *The Gospel of Matthew and Its Readers: A Historical Introduction to the First Gospel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003) 238. The text further reads, “And the priest said: Choose for me by lot who shall spin the gold, and the white, and the fine linen, and the silk, and the blue, and the scarlet, and the true purple. And the true purple and the scarlet fell to the lot of Mary, and she took them, and went away to her house.”

behind such accounts, it does seem clear that “they used to make two in every year” (*Exod. Rab.* 50:4 [on *Exod* 36:35]). It also appears that there were two veils at any given time; *t. Sheq.* 3:15 says, “R. Ḥanina b. Antigonus says, ‘There were two veils [*m. Sheq.* 8:5], one spread out, and one folded up. [If] the one which was spread out was made unclean, they spread out the one which was folded up. On the eve of the Day of Atonement they bring in the new one and take out the old one.’”

Traditions perhaps not unrelated to the Roman procession by the Flavians, following their victory over Jerusalem and plundering its temple, place the veil in Rome.⁵³ R. Eleazar son of R. Jose, who may date to the generation after Bar Kokhba,⁵⁴ was said to have seen it in Rome “and there were on it several drops of blood” (*b. Me'ail.* 17b; *b. Yoma* 57a; *Exod. Rab.* 50:4 [on *Exod* 36:35]). Josephus, seemingly dependent on 1 Macc 1:22; 4:51, reports that it was Antiochus Epiphanes who stole holy objects as well as “veils” (*Ant.* 12.5.4 §250) from the temple. Perhaps related to these legends is a series of interesting portents said to have occurred surrounding the destruction of the temple at the hands of the Romans. Rabbis claimed that about 40 years before the destruction of the temple, its enormous doors swung open by themselves and found that way in the morning (*y. Yoma* 6:43c; *b. Yoma* 39b), an event which was interpreted by the rabbis as predicting its ultimate destruction (*Sifre Deut.* §328 [on *Deut* 32:38]).⁵⁵ The event was allegedly “heard through eight Sabbath limits” (*b. Yoma* 39b). However, some scholars have suggested the reference to “forty years before the destruction of the temple” elsewhere in rabbinic literature (esp. *y. Sanh.* 1:1; 7:2) is “probably a round number which refers to the beginning of direct rule by the Romans in AD 6.”⁵⁶

In his *Histories* (5:13) Tacitus reports that at the assault on Jerusalem “prodigies had indeed occurred.”⁵⁷ Among them, he reports that

Contending hosts were seen meeting in the skies, arms flashed, and suddenly the temple was illumined with fire from the clouds (*rutilantia arma et subito nubium igne conlucere templum*). Of a sudden the doors of the shrine opened and a superhuman voice cried: “The gods are departing” (*Apertae repente delubri*

⁵³ Cf. Légasse, “Les voiles” 587, who presumes Rome is the origin of the Synoptic veil tradition. Cf. also S. G. F. Brandon, “The Date of the Markan Gospel,” *NTS* 7 (1961) 126–41.

⁵⁴ H. L. Strack and G. Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (trans. and ed. M. Bockmuehl; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 22.

⁵⁵ Cf. Adolf Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Matthäus: Seine Sprache, sein Ziel, seine Selbständigkeit* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1957) 783–84; W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (ABC 26; New York: Doubleday, 1971) 351; Alan Hugh McNeile, *The Gospel according to St Matthew* (London: Macmillan, 1915) 423; Willoughby Charles Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Matthew* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912) 296; cf. Craig A. Evans, “Prediction of the Destruction of the Herodian Temple in the Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Scrolls, and Related Texts,” *JSP* 10 (1992) 89–147.

⁵⁶ Graham N. Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus* (2d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 280.

⁵⁷ Brown, *Death* 2.1114; McNeile, *St Matthew* 423; Albright and Mann, *Matthew* 351; Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (SP 1; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1983) 400; David Wenham, “The Resurrection Narratives in Matthew’s Gospel,” *TynB* 24 (1973) 46; Allen, *S. Matthew* 296.

fores et audita maior humana vox excedere deos): at the same moment the mighty stir of their going was heard. Few interpreted these omens as fearful; the majority firmly believed that their ancient priestly writings contained the prophecy that this was the very time when the East should grow strong and that men starting from Judea should possess the world. This mysterious prophecy had in reality pointed to Vespasian and Titus, but the common people, as is the way of human ambition, interpreted these great destinies in their own favour, and could not be turned to the truth even by adversity. (LCL)

This text seems to be dependent upon Josephus (*J.W.* 6.5.3 §§288–309),⁵⁸ who lists eight wonders that occurred within the decade prior to the destruction of the temple, which he saw as God-given portents of that impending tragedy: there was a sword-shaped star in the sky; a comet that continued for a year; a bright light that shone around the altar and the sanctuary at 3 a.m.; and chariots and armies seen in the clouds throughout the country. There were also signs within the temple itself. A cow was seen giving birth to a lamb; the enormous brass eastern gate of the inner court, which could hardly be moved by twenty men, was seen opening by itself at midnight; the priests in the inner court hearing a collective voice at Pentecost, “We are departing from here” (i.e. the sanctuary); years of “Woe!”s against Jerusalem and sanctuary uttered by Jesus bar Ananias (whom the Jerusalem authorities seized, beat, and handed over to the Romans to be put to death, only to have him released by the governors as mad)” (LCL).

Details of these fascinating texts cannot be explored here, save to comment that perhaps they reflect the notion that behind military battles lay a struggle of the respective deities. Scholars have frequently noted that in antiquity divinities gave extraordinary signs at the death of noble figures. For example, Raymond Brown notes the lunar eclipse on the night when Herod the Great put Matthaïas to death (Josephus, *Ant.* 17.6.4; §167) and a voice from heaven declared the heavenly destiny of a Jewish martyr (cf. *b. Ber.* 61b; *b. Abod. Zar.* 18a).⁵⁹ Similarly, in Greco-Roman thought, there were eclipses at the deaths of Romulus and of Julius Caesar (cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 1.472–90, esp. 466–88). Upon the death of Hercules, the doors of Jupiter’s temple swung open.⁶⁰ A comet appeared at the death of Claudius, as well as showers of blood, a miraculous thunderbolt, and the opening of the temple of Jupiter (Cassius Dio, *History* 61.35.1).⁶¹ The opening of doors could also be seen as welcoming worshippers to the temple of the deity, as may have been the case with Artemis.⁶²

Also likely dependent on Josephus, Jerome provides interesting developments of the veil tradition, most capably surveyed in recent years by Raymond

⁵⁸ Brown, *Death* 2.1114, n. 39; S. V. McCasland, “Portents in Josephus and in the Gospels,” *JBL* 51 (1932) 330–31; though cf. H. W. Montefiore, “Josephus and the New Testament,” *NovT* 4 (1960) 152.

⁵⁹ Brown, *Death* 2.1113.

⁶⁰ Cf. Plutarch, *Romulus* 27.6; *Caesar* 69.4; Ovid, *Fasti* 2.493; Cicero, *Resp.* 6.22; Pliny, *Nat.* 2.30 §97; Cassius Dio, *History* 51.17.4–5.

⁶¹ *Death* 2.1113–14.

⁶² Cf. J. Kampen, “The Cult of Artemis and the Essenes in Syro-Palestine,” *DSD* 10 (2003) 207.

Brown. Brown recognizes that the six references to the veil in Jerome's writing cover a span of almost 30 years (between AD 380 and 409) and, he suggests, are inconsistent and "may reflect a growing tradition in Jerome's own mind."⁶³ First, in *Epistle* 18a,⁶⁴ Jerome, commenting on the theophany of Isa 6:4, quotes a Greek father (Gregory Nazianzus?) who sees Isaiah's shaking of the lintels fulfilled in the destruction and burning of Jerusalem and its temple. Jerome indicates that others held that the temple lintel was overturned when the veil was torn, at which time utter chaos ensued and a heavenly voice announced departure. He says nearly the same thing in his *Epistle* 46,⁶⁵ yet he suggests that the voice announcing departure was spoken at the same time that Christ was crucified. In his *Commentarium in Matt.* 4,⁶⁶ Jerome makes reference to a gospel in Hebrew characters, to which he often refers.⁶⁷ In that gospel, he says, "We read that the temple lintel of infinite size was shattered and fractured." Apparently the broken lintel then tore the veil. (This may be what is depicted in this scene in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*.) Jerome then repeats the Josephus reference about the outcry of the angelic hosts. In *Epistle* 120⁶⁸ Jerome again cites Josephus and his Hebrew gospel, where we find "not that the veil of the temple was rent, but that the temple lintel (*superliminare*) of great size was heaved over."⁶⁹ Coming back to Isa 6:4, he again refers to the overturning of the lintel of the Herodian temple, adding that all its hinges were broken and the whole scene fulfilled Jesus' threat in Matt 23:38 that the "house" would be left desolate, an event which he says took place 42 years after the Passion (*Commentarium in Isaiam* 3).⁷⁰ Later in the same writing, Jerome again sees the siege on Jerusalem as relevant and again looks to Josephus concerning the cry of the "angelic hosts who presided over the temple" (*Commentarium in Isaiam* 18 [on Isa 66:6]).⁷¹ Other early Christians have followed Josephus and Jerome,⁷² particularly Tertullian (*Adv. Iudaeus* 13.15), who says of the rending of the

⁶³ Brown, *Death* 2.1116, n. 42. Cf. Theodor Zahn, "Der zerrissene Tempelvorhang," *NKZ* 13 (1902) 733, 740, 751, 753; Allen, *S. Matthew* 296.

⁶⁴ *Ad Damasum Papam* 9; CSEL 54.86.

⁶⁵ *Paulae et Eustochii ad Marcellam* 4; CSEL 54.333.

⁶⁶ On 27:51; SC 259.298.

⁶⁷ See Brown, *Death* 2.1117, n. 43; Marie-Joseph Lagrange, "L'Évangile selon les Hébreux," *RB* 31 (1922) 161–81, 321–44; Albertus Frederik Johannes Klijn, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition* (VCSupp 17; Leiden: Brill, 1992) 1–43, 93, 94.

⁶⁸ *Ad Hedybiam* 8; CSEL 55.489–90; McNeile, *St Matthew* 423.

⁶⁹ Brown, *Death* 2.1117; cf. Allen, *S. Matthew* 296; Albright and Mann, *Matthew* 351.

⁷⁰ CC 73.87.

⁷¹ Brown, *Death* 2.1117, 1118, n. 45; McNeile, *St Matthew* 423. Eberhard Nestle ("Matt 27,51 und Parallelen," *ZNW* 3 [1902] 167–69; cf. idem, "Sonnenfinsternis bei Jesu Tod," *ZNW* 3 [1902] 246–47) contends that Jerome's *superliminare* = כַּפְתֹּר ("lintel") which was misunderstood as פֶּרֶכָה ("veil"). This is rightly criticized by Gustaf Dalman (*The Words of Jesus: Considered in the Light of Post-Biblical Jewish Writings* [trans. D. M. Kay; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902] 56).

⁷² Cf. *The Ascents of James* (Ps. Clem. Recog. 1.41.3); Tertullian (*Adv. Marcion*. 4.42.5; CC 1.660); *Gospel (Questions) of Bartholomew* 24–27 (HSNTA 1.491; rev. ed. 1.542–43); *Transitus Mariae* (difficult to date) 10 (JANT 195); Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.8.1–9; *Dem. Ev.* 8.2.121–24; GCS 23.389–90; *Proteuangelium of James* 24:3; cf. Brown, *Death* 2.1116–18; Marinus de Jonge, "Matthew 27:51 in Early Christian Exegesis," *HTR* 79 (1986) 67–69; McNeile, *St Matthew* 423.

veil (*velum scissum*) text that the Holy Spirit (an angel?) which dwelt in the temple prior to Christ's death departed afterwards: "He deserted the Temple [leaving it] desolate, rending the veil and taking away from it the holy spirit."⁷³ Brown cites the curious *Transitus Mariae* 10 which, though difficult to date, has the women who ministered in the Temple flee into the holy of holies during the crucifixion darkness: "There they see an angel come down with a sword to rend the veil in two and hear a loud voice uttering woe against Jerusalem for killing the prophets. When they see the angel of the altar fly up into the altar canopy with the angel of the sword, they know 'that God has left His people.'"⁷⁴

Another tradition, though probably apocryphal,⁷⁵ recounts an episode involving the Roman general Titus at the time of his utter defeat of the Jews. *B. Git.* 56b claims that upon his victory Titus said, "Where is their God, the rock in whom they trusted [Deut 32:37]?" Then "the wicked Titus who blasphemed and insulted Heaven" committed two atrocities in the temple: First, he "took a harlot by the hand and entered the Holy of Holies and spread out a scroll of the Law and committed a sin on it." After this, he "took a sword and slashed the curtain (פרכור; cf. *Sifre Deut.* §328 [on Deut 32:38]). Miraculously blood spurted out, and he thought that he had slain himself." Some understand this as a euphemism for slaying God.⁷⁶ The rabbis then cite Ps 74:4 as a prediction of the mockery displayed by Titus, and then Ps 89:9, praising Yahweh for his forbearance in not striking that "wicked man" dead. The text goes on: "Titus further took the curtain and shaped it like a basket and brought all the vessels of the Sanctuary and put them in it, and then put them on board ship to go and triumph with them in his city." This is cited as a fulfillment of a prediction in Eccl 8:10. Regardless of the authenticity of this record, it nonetheless reveals what is perhaps a significant picture of the role of the veil in rabbinic temple ideology. It shows that the destruction of the temple was, in hindsight, seen by the rabbis as fulfilling OT prophecies down to these minute points. To be sure, however, such predictions were also found *prior* to the event.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, it seems clear that the description of Titus "slashing" the curtain and blood "spurting" out is a figurative expression, for it seems to have been sufficiently intact to serve as a basket for his alleged carrying away of the other cultic articles. The tradition of Titus cutting the veil may derive from a tradition common with that from *Lives of the Prophets*, which says the curtain will be "torn into small pieces" (*Liv. Pro.* 12:11).⁷⁸ Josephus makes no mention of their being cut (though perhaps this

⁷³ Brown, *Death* 2.1101–2; citing CC 2.1388. Cf. *Didascalia Apostolorum* 6.5.7.

⁷⁴ Brown, *Death* 2.1115, n. 41; JANT 195.

⁷⁵ Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20* (WBC 34b; Nashville: Nelson, 2001) 510.

⁷⁶ I. Epstein, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud* (trans. I. Epstein; Vol. 7; London: Soncino, 1936) 259, n. 5. Cf. Gösta Lindeskog, "The Veil of the Temple," in *In honorem A. Fridrichsen sexagenarii* (ConBNT 11; Lund: Gleerup, 1947) 135.

⁷⁷ Cf. Evans, "Prediction of the Destruction of the Herodian Temple" 89–147.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 99.

would go too far even for Josephus to report), but seems to presume they were taken intact by the Romans (*J.W.* 6.8.3 §389–91) and displayed in the “Temple of Peace” (*J.W.* 7.5.7 §158–62). If it is a figurative expression, the rabbis have clearly associated it with both the humiliating defeat of the Jews and, perhaps more importantly, the utter destruction and defilement not just of the temple but also of its function as a cultic mediating point between Jews and Yahweh. The defilement of the temple is important, for it shows that it was “no longer a clean dwelling place for [God]” (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.8.5 §166 LCL; cf. *J.W.* 5.1.3 §19).⁷⁹

III. THE VEIL OF THE TEMPLE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

It is difficult to date these varying traditions and impossible to know the extent to which NT authors were familiar with them, if at all. Indeed, Marinus de Jonge is critical of those who look to such texts as Josephus for answers to the Synoptic rending puzzle, on the grounds that the gospel authors show no familiarity with these sources.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, this shadowy cultic article appears at pivotal moments in the respective Synoptic passion narratives (Matt 27:51a; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45) and in three significant Christological texts in the book of Hebrews (Heb 6:19; 9:3; 10:20).

In each of the Synoptics the *velum scissum* occurs in the passion narratives in close relation to Jesus’ death. David Ulansey, building on the work of Stephen Motyer,⁸¹ shows that Mark uses the *velum scissum* to bracket his entire gospel with the splitting open of heaven (Mark 1:10), creating a “cosmic inclusio”: Mark associates the splitting (σχίζω) of the heavens (Mark 1:10) with the splitting (σχίζω) of the veil (Mark 15:38).⁸² Indeed, Paul Lamarche has argued that the association of the rent heavens (Mark 1:10) with the rent veil (Mark 15:38) suggests an apocalyptic, or revelatory, function of the *velum scissum*.⁸³ What is revealed is that Jesus is, in some sense, “son of God” (the centurion’s υἱὸς θεοῦ, Mark 15:39). Previously in Mark’s gospel, only God (Mark 1:11) and “evil spirits” (Mark 3:11) identify Jesus as God’s Son. Even in Mark’s account of Peter’s confession there is no mention of divine sonship (Mark 8:29; cf. Matt 16:16). Only subsequent to the *velum scissum* is υἱὸς θεοῦ used in Mark as a confessional assertion. Mark has then brilliantly revealed Jesus as “Son of God” at the splitting of the heavens at Jesus’ baptism (Mark 1:10–11) and at the splitting of the veil at the “baptism” (Mark 10:38–39) of Jesus’ death (Mark 15:38–39). Though

⁷⁹ Cf. B. W. Longenecker, “Rome’s Victory and God’s Honour: The Jerusalem Temple and the Spirit of God in Lukan Theodicy,” in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins: Essays in Honor of James D. G. Dunn* (ed. G. N. Stanton, B. W. Longenecker, and S. C. Barton; Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004) 93.

⁸⁰ De Jonge, “Matthew 27:51 in Early Christian Exegesis” 68–69.

⁸¹ Stephen Motyer, “The Rending of the Veil: A Markan Pentecost?” *NTS* 33 (1987) 155–57.

⁸² David Ulansey, “The Heavenly Veil Torn: Mark’s Cosmic Inclusio,” *JBL* 110 (1991) 124.

⁸³ Paul Lamarche, “La mort du Christ et le voile du temple selon Marc,” *NRT* 106 (1974) 588.

there has been much discussion pertaining to the anarthrous $\nu\acute{\iota}\delta\omicron\varsigma\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ statement at Mark 15:38, Mark's structural association of the beginning with the end of his gospel indicates that its meaning at Mark 15:38 is to be identified with that at Mark 1:11, which is clearly messianic. One could say, then, that Mark's infamous "messianic secret" is out.

The Matthean account of the *velum scissum* is more difficult.⁸⁴ If we presume Markan priority, Matthew seems to have found the account in his Markan source to be lacking. For in addition to changing Mark's singular centurion (Mark 15:39) into a crowd (Matt 27:54), he has inserted a strikingly unique account of splitting of stones and raising of holy ones, who, subsequent to Jesus' resurrection, appeared in the "holy city." As in Mark, Matthew's *velum scissum* functions as a revelatory device indicating that what follows is part of an apocalyptic vision seen by the Roman soldiers. Yet the revelation of Jesus' divine sonship is preceded in Matthew by a series of graphic images (Matt 27:51b–53) which have been widely seen to reflect the restoration prophecy of Ezekiel 37 (cf. Zechariah 14; Daniel 12). These images show exiles returning home and God dwelling among his people. It is important that for Matthew these remarkable eschatological events designate the turning of the page in God's soteriological saga, the dawning of the messianic age which Matthew uniquely and clearly indicates is inaugurated by the death of Jesus.

The *velum scissum* in the Lukan context has received careful attention by Joel B. Green, who locates the veil within "the larger Lukan emphasis on the obliteration of the barriers between those peoples previously divided by status and ethnicity."⁸⁵ Thus Luke's *velum scissum* depicts "the extension of the good news to those outside the social boundaries determined by the temple itself."⁸⁶ Unlike Mark and Matthew, Luke places both of the miraculous portents surrounding the death of Jesus *before* his death (the darkness and the veil; Luke 23:44–45), and only the human responses after Jesus' death (Luke 23:47–49). His arrangement seems to be more topical than chronological, while retaining the centurion's profession as the product of the revelatory assertion depicted by the *velum scissum*. If this is the case, what the centurion recognizes is not that Jesus was the "Son of God" (Mark 15:39; Matt 27:54), but that he was "a righteous man" ($\omicron\upsilon\nu\tau\omega\varsigma\ \omicron\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\rho\omega\pi\omicron\varsigma\ \omicron\acute{\iota}\tau\omicron\varsigma\ \delta\acute{\iota}\kappa\alpha\iota\omicron\varsigma\ \eta\tilde{\iota}\nu$; Luke 23:47). Indeed, Luke seems quite concerned that important figures in his Gospel are $\delta\acute{\iota}\kappa\alpha\iota\omicron\varsigma$.⁸⁷ Joseph and Mary (Luke 1:6), Simeon (Luke 2:25), and Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50) all bear that trait. How much more is this true of the one by whose death social boundaries are broken.

⁸⁴ For a comprehensive discussion of the rending of the veil in Matthew, see Daniel M. Gurtner, *The Velum Scissum: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus* (Ph.D. diss., University of St Andrews, 2005). Forthcoming as *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus* (SNTSMS; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁸⁵ Joel B. Green, "The Death of Jesus and the Rending of the Temple Veil: A Window into Luke's Understanding of Jesus and the Temple," *SBLSP* 30 (1991) 543.

⁸⁶ Green, "Death of Jesus" 552.

⁸⁷ The term occurs in Luke 1:6, 17; 2:25; 5:32; 12:57; 14:14; 15:7; 18:9; 20:20; 23:47, 50.

The author of Hebrews depicts a fascinating Christological progression in his use of veil traditions.⁸⁸ At Heb 4:14–16 the author presents Jesus, as high priest, passing “through the heavens,” that is, entering the heavenly Holy of Holies (see the parallels with Heb 10:19–21). The heavenly veil is first mentioned overtly at Heb 6:19–20, where Jesus goes behind the veil ahead of believers (εἰς τὸ ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπέτασματος, Heb 6:19) and on their behalf (Heb 6:20). This high priestly ministry is developed in Heb 7:1–10:18. The Son of God is first appointed as a superior priest (Heb 7:11–28). Then, Christ, as high priest of the new covenant (Heb 8:1–13; 9:11), enters the heavenly Most Holy Place, behind the heavenly antecedent (Heb 9:11) of the earthly “second curtain” (τὸ δευτερον καταπέτασμα; Heb 9:3), by means of his own self-sacrificial blood (Heb 9:12).⁸⁹ Finally, believers themselves are declared to have “confidence” (παρησίαν) to enter the Most Holy Place “by the blood of Jesus” (ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ; Heb 10:19), which is described as a “new and living way” opened to believers “through the curtain, that is, his body” (διὰ τοῦ καταπέτασματος, τοῦτ’ ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ; Heb 10:20).⁹⁰ Though there is some discussion as to whether the veil at Heb 10:20 is identified with ὁδὸν (“way”⁹¹) or τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ (“his [Jesus] flesh”), it seems most natural to identify the καταπέτασμα with σάρκος⁹² and to take the δία as instrumental.⁹³ Thus, for the author of Hebrews, “Jesus secured access to God’s presence ‘by means of’ his flesh.”⁹⁴

III. CONCLUSION

For the evangelists, this is the veil that was torn as a result of Jesus’ death. Similarly, in Hebrews its prohibitive function is penetrated by means of the sacrificial death of Christ. Though it is difficult to consider harmonization of these two traditions, it may be the case that the collective voices of the evangelist and author of Hebrews indicate that the veil is torn to open the way for Jesus to ascend to God and offer his sacrifice there.⁹⁵ Regardless,

⁸⁸ I owe credit for this observation and thanks for guidance in its discussion to George H. Guthrie.

⁸⁹ Cf. Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 424; Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989) 234; Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (ABC 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001) 394; William L. Lane, *Hebrews* (2 vols.; WBC 47a–b; Dallas: Word, 1991) 2.220.

⁹⁰ Cf. Ellingworth, *Hebrews* 519; Joachim Jeremias, “Hebräer 10:20: τοῦτ’ ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ,” *ZNW* 62 (1971) 131; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 286. For discussion on this issue, see Attridge, *Hebrews* 286; L. D. Hurst, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Background of Thought* (SNTMS 65; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 28–29.

⁹¹ Lane, *Hebrews* 2.284.

⁹² For discussion, see Ellingworth, *Hebrews* 519; Jeremias, “Hebräer 10:20” 131; Attridge, *Hebrews* 286.

⁹³ “By means of Christ’s flesh” rather than local (“through Christ’s flesh”). Cf. Koester, *Hebrews* 443; Ellingworth, *Hebrews* 520.

⁹⁴ Koester, *Hebrews* 443.

⁹⁵ I owe credit for this intriguing proposal to I. Howard Marshall.

the tearing was not a byproduct of the desecration of the Jerusalem shrine, as seen in rabbinic texts which record that Titus, who upon his assault of the holy city, “took a sword and slashed the curtain” (*b. Git.* 56b). Indeed, it is impossible to know if any of the Gospel authors were familiar with these traditions. Instead, what is important, especially for Matthew, is the divine agency of its rending (as seen by the “divine passive” ἐσχίσθη and the use of ἀπ’ ἄνωθεν). Moreover, the deed is irreparable (the veil was split εἰς δύο). The drama of the Synoptic passion accounts illustrates the grace and love of God in that the profound miracle of the veil’s rending was not the result of a wielded sword but a yielded life.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ This essay is dedicated to the memory of Donald J. Verseput (Rev 14:13). The author is grateful to David Instone-Brewer, who provided thought-provoking conversation and several corrections to an earlier draft of this essay.