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978-0-521-87064-1 - The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus

Daniel M. Gurtner

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INTRODUCTION

The narrative flow of Jesus' Passion account in Matthew 27 shifts abruptly when Jesus 'gave up his spirit' (27:50). Up to this point, the reader follows Jesus as he is interrogated by Pilate in Jerusalem (27:11–26), taken to the Praetorium to be beaten and mocked (27:27–31a) and led away to Golgotha for crucifixion (27:31b–44). The narrative continues by recounting the darkness (27:45), Jesus' recitation of a portion of Psalm 22 (27:46) and the responses of 'those standing there' (27:47–49). Then the narrative presents Jesus crying out in a loud voice and giving up his spirit (27:50). At this point in the account the reader is propelled from the narrative sequence and scene at Golgotha into a meta-narrative (vv 51–53) in which, among other events, the veil of the temple is torn in two. What is remarkable is that although each Synoptic Evangelist records this event, none of them stops to explain it.¹ The lack of explanation on the part of the Evangelists, it seems, has contributed to the great variety of interpretations of this event offered throughout the history of Christendom. Scholars both ancient and modern have addressed the enigmas raised by this text from a variety of methodological perspectives with discouragingly differing, often contradictory conclusions. Some scholars have lamented that the meaning of the rent veil in Matthew will probably never be discerned with any degree of certainty.² While the present volume is by no means the final word on this complicated text, I contend that the history of the interpretation of the rending of the veil (*velum scissum*) provides significant data from which we can glean sound methods towards modest progress in moving the discussion of the rent veil forward. Therefore each

¹ D. A. Hagner presumes that 'the evangelist can leave this unexplained because it was so familiar to the early church'. *Matthew* (2 vols.; WBC 33A–B; Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1995), II, p. 849. R. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1994), argues that neither the author nor his readers understood the symbolism.

² M. de Jonge, 'Matthew 27:51 in Early Christian Exegesis', *HTR* 79 (1986), 74; A. Barnes, *The Gospels* (2 vols.; Edinburgh: Blackie & Son, 1841) I, p. 320.

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method will be categorised, documented and analysed for its effectiveness in bringing together relevant data for a coherent interpretation of the rending of the veil in Matthew 27:51a.

1 The State of the Discussion

Discussion of the rending of the temple veil begins with Ephraem the Syrian,³ who represents an early trend in scholarship that endures to the present day. In his *Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron* (written c. 363–373), he illustrates the ambiguity of this event by providing a variety of interpretations.⁴ He begins by commenting that the rending shows 'that [the Lord] had taken the kingdom away [from the Jews?] and had given it to others who would bear fruit'.⁵ He then provides a diverse and lengthy list of 'alternative' interpretations, including the destruction of the temple because God's Spirit had departed from it, the Spirit's rending the veil in mourning as the high priest tore his robe during the wrongful accusations against Jesus and God's throwing down the curtain of the temple as Judas threw down the gold he received for his betrayal, to mention only a few.⁶ Indeed, throughout his commentary Ephraem moves 'freely from one interpretation to another . . . without really choosing one of them'.⁷ As we shall see, prior to Ephraem and since, scholars have been occupied with interpreting the rending of the veil, regardless of its synoptic context, by a variety of means which often relate to which veil (inner, outer, both or neither) is in view and what the implications of its rending are for the then-present (Herodian) temple. This variety, surveyed below,⁸ includes arguing for a particular view based on **lexical**

³ For a survey of the earliest interpretations, cf. de Jonge, 'Matthew 27:51 in Early Christian Exegesis', 67–79. An earlier version of this chapter first appeared in D. M. Gurtner, 'The Tearing of the Temple Curtain: A Look Back and a Way Forward', *Them.* 29 (2004), 4–14. See also A. Pelletier, 'La tradition synoptique du "Voile déchiré" à la lumière des réalités archéologiques', *RSR* 46 (1958), 161–66; M. de Jonge, 'De berichten over het scheuren van het voorhangsel bij Jesus' dood in de Synoptische evangeliën', *NTT* 21 (1966), 90–114.

⁴ While we appreciate pre-critical scholarship's desire to recognise a plurality of meanings to enrich interpretation, we will see below (pp. 124–8) that such plurality is not necessarily warranted by the compositional whole of Matthew's Gospel.

⁵ *Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron* 41.4–6 (*Mark* [ACCS: NT2]; trans. and ed. T. C. Oden and C. A. Hall; London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998], *ad loc.*). See Matt. 21:43.

⁶ See Oden and Hall, *Mark*, *ad loc.*; de Jonge, 'Matthew 27:51 in Early Christian Exegesis', 74.

⁷ de Jonge, 'Matthew 27:51 in Early Christian Exegesis', 74. Elsewhere, however, Ephraem cites the rending of the veil as evidence for the divine nature of Christ (*Serm. on the trans.* 7.4).

⁸ For a list of the thirty-five (undocumented) interpretations counted by one scholar, see T. J. Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* (JSNTSup 26; Sheffield:

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discussions of the use of καταπέτασμα, the necessity of the veil's being **visible** to the centurion who subsequently (especially in Mark) professes his faith or an **apologetic** interpretation. Other arguments are **Christological** in orientation and based largely on the relationship between Jesus' death and the three veil texts in Hebrews. A final group of **miscellaneous** interpretations are largely historical in nature and seem to fit into none of the other categories. A few scholars have proposed a single rationale for their interpretation but most prefer to employ a variety of overlapping bases for their conclusions. Therefore the survey provided below does not intend to account for the extremely complicated mixture of methods and resulting interpretations employed throughout Christendom, but rather serves to illustrate both the complexity of the issues involved and the lack of substantial agreement among scholars evaluating precisely the same evidence. We will see that use of familiar methods that are to date inadequately applied to this issue is in order.

1.1 The Lexical Argument

The most obvious, although least fruitful, argument on which an interpretation is based is lexical in orientation. The text of Matthew 27:51a reads, 'καὶ ἰδοὺ τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ ἐσχίσθη ἀπ' ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω εἰς δύο'.⁹ The question is, to which (if any) of the two (or more) 'veils' described first in Exod. 26:4–33 that Matthew presumably alludes to does his use of τὸ καταπέτασμα refer? Whereas most scholars draw attention to the ambiguity of the lexical evidence,¹⁰ a handful of scholars have based a significant portion of their interpretation of the rending of the veil upon the lexical evidence of καταπέτασμα.

Some have speculated that the 'specification of "the" curtain (27:51) strongly favors the inner curtain'.¹¹ Others have argued that in the LXX, καταπέτασμα is the preferred term for the inner veil, whereas

Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), pp. 140–45. For a more comprehensive account of particularly ancient Christian interpretations, see Pelletier, 'La tradition synoptique', 161–66; Gurtner, 'The Tearing of the Temple Curtain', 4–14.

⁹ Textual variations and the varying synoptic accounts will be considered in Chapter 6.

¹⁰ Seemingly only Philo makes a distinction between καταπέτασμα and other terms for curtains in the temple, a point overlooked by T. Zahn, 'Der zerrissene Tempelvorhang', *NKZ* 13 (1902), 730. See C. Schneider, 'Καταπέτασμα', *TDNT* III, p. 629; D. Juel, *Messiah and Temple: The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (SBLDS 31; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), p. 140.

¹¹ C. S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 686, n. 243. Similarly Eta Linnemann, *Studien zur Passionsgeschichte* (FRLANT 102; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), p. 159.

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ἐπίσπαστρον¹² or κάλυμμα¹³ refers to the outer.¹⁴ Similarly scholars have looked to extracanonical sources (esp. Philo, *Moses* 2.101,¹⁵ and Josephus¹⁶) that allegedly make such a lexical distinction to insist that the inner veil in front of the holy of holies is in view for the Evangelists.¹⁷ While those who argue from a lexical standpoint are unanimously in favour of the inner veil, their subsequent interpretations are less consistent. W. Grundmann interprets the rending of the veil as among other 'kosmisch-apokalyptisch' events at Jesus' death, which is a 'Hinweis auf die Heilsvollmacht Jesu: Er eröffnet den Zugang zu Gott'.¹⁸ Similarly, C. F. Keil takes his lexical conclusions to the only other New Testament references to the καταπέτασμα (Heb. 6:19, 9:3, 10:20) and insists that 'Das Zerreißen des Vorhangs beim Tode des Herrn bezeichnet also diesen Tod als das Mittel der Versöhnung der Menschen mit Gott', thus allowing access to God himself. The temple and the temple-cult are therefore no longer necessary.¹⁹ F. Bleek claims that by means of the rending of the καταπέτασμα, 'der Blick und Zutritt in das Allerheiligste eröffnet'.²⁰ He concludes that the Evangelists record a 'poëtische Darstellung' with 'symbolischer Bedeutung', namely that Jesus' death provides redemption, by means of which believers enter into the holy of holies.²¹

How scholars arrive at such interpretations solely on the basis of a dubious evaluation of lexical evidence is often not clarified and is typically devoid of any discussion of the Matthean context.²² C. E. B. Cranfield, to name but one such scholar, is tentative in his identification of the veil because of the lexical inconclusiveness of καταπέτασμα in the LXX.²³ Even C. Schneider in his lexical work exclusively on καταπέτασμα

¹² E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus* (4th edn; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), p. 395.

¹³ F. Bleek, *Synoptische Erklärung der drei ersten Evangelien* (ed. H. Holtzmann; Leipzig: Engelmann, 1862), p. 475, adds κάλυμμα to the discussion of ἐπίσπαστρον, and also suggests καταπέτασμα is the preferred LXX rendering of פֶּרֶז.

¹⁴ Lohmeyer (*Matthäus*, p. 395, n. 3) draws this distinction, erroneously insisting that 'diese Unterscheidung wird fast durchweg festgehalten'. Similarly L. C. Fillion and M. A. Bayle, *Évangile selon S. Matthieu* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1878), p. 554, suggest καταπέτασμα is an ordinary name ('appellation ordinaire') for the inner veil, although their interpretation lies more in its relation to Heb. 9:8.

¹⁵ Philo is the primary evidence for W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1968), p. 562.

¹⁶ Josephus is the primary evidence employed by C. F. Keil, *Kommentar über das Evangelium des Matthäus* (Leipzig: Döfferling und Franke, 1877), p. 590.

¹⁷ Grundmann, *Matthäus*, p. 562. See Str-B III, p. 733.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 562. ¹⁹ Keil, *Matthäus*, p. 590.

²⁰ Bleek, *Erklärung*, p. 475. ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 476.

²² An exception being Fillion and Bayle, *Matthieu*, p. 554, who clearly use their lexical data as one among other arguments for their conclusion.

²³ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), pp. 459–60. So also G. R. Driver, 'Two Problems in the New

favours the inner veil for its 'cultic significance' rather than lexical evidence.²⁴ It was 'the most important curtain of the temple'.²⁵ Although careful consideration of lexical issues pertaining to the veil will be thoroughly explored in Chapter 2 of this work, most scholars suggest that there is insufficient consistent use of the term καταπέτασμα in canonical texts to determine with certainty which veil is being referred to, let alone to base an interpretation solely upon this term, and it is therefore rightly given proportional weight in the overall arguments. The lexical identity of the καταπέτασμα must then be considered with other factors.

1.2 The Visibility Argument

Another way to interpret the rending of the veil is by the centurion's apparent response to it. All three synoptic references to the event (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45) place the centurion's confession 'ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς ἦν οὗτος' (Matt. 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47)²⁶ after the rending of the veil. Origen (c. 185–254; *Comm. Matt.* 140), although focusing on the response of fear, follows the text closely and literally to suggest 'the centurion and those with him saw how the veil of the Temple was rent from top to bottom'.²⁷ Scholars, then, see the centurion's remark as a response to the rending of the veil, which is among τὰ γενόμενα he beheld.²⁸ This view argues that the (Gentile) centurion would be permitted to see only the *outer* veil. Moreover, in order to be seen from Golgotha the veil must have been quite tall. Josephus describes the outer veil as being 55 cubits high (*J.W.* 5.5.4 §§211–12), which not only would allow the centurion to see the veil from that distance but also would conceal the inner veil from his view.

The strongest and most thorough modern proponent of this view, H. M. Jackson, argues that owing to its size²⁹ and its 'hanging where and how it

Testament', *JTS* 16 (1965), 336; J. E. Yates, *The Spirit and the Kingdom* (London: SPCK, 1963), p. 232; Str-B I, p. 1044.

²⁴ Schneider, *TDNT* III, p. 629. Similarly K. H. Maahs, 'Curtain', *ISBE* I, p. 838; Keener, *Matthew*, pp. 686–87; G. Lindeskog, 'Vorhang', *BHB* III, p. 2119; Linnemann, *Studien*, p. 159; Str-B can only decide 'nur theologische Gründe den Ausschlag geben' (Str-B I, p. 1045), and favours the inner because of 'der hohen kultischen Bedeutung des inneren Vorhangs'.

²⁵ F. Ó Fearghail, 'Sir 50, 5–21: Yom Kippur or the Daily Whole-Offering?' *Bib.* 59 (1978), 310.

²⁶ The accounts are slightly different, and will be considered in detail in Chapter 6.

²⁷ *Matthew* 140 (*ANF* VI, p. 90) (emphasis mine).

²⁸ What precisely is 'seen' will be discussed in Chapter 6.

²⁹ W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988, 1991, 1997), III, p. 630, suggest the outer veil is in mind partially because 'the effect is less dramatic if the words concern the much smaller

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did' (*J.W.* 5.5.4 §§207–9) the veil 'must have been capable of being seen from a great distance'.³⁰ In a detailed topographical discussion on the subject, he argues that Golgotha was on the Mount of Olives, 'for it is the only place of sufficient elevation outside the walls of the city from which the outer curtain of the Temple, facing east, could be clearly seen, away across the Wadi Kidron'.³¹ Jesus' death being a very visual event,³² the rending of the veil must also have been a visual phenomenon to which, it is argued, the profession of faith by the centurion bears witness. As were the other 'signs associated with Jesus' death', the rending of the veil is likely to have been 'public'.³³ Moreover, if the inner veil *were* in mind, only the Jewish priests would have witnessed the rending, and they certainly would not have publicised this event!³⁴

As with the lexical arguments, interpretations based on visibility are quite diverse. Origen proposes, among other things, 'a moral interpretation' which brings one to the 'fear of God' that will 'bear witness that He who has suffered these things is the Son of God'.³⁵ T. E. Schmidt suggests that the 'rending may foreshadow God's judgment on the Temple; but, at a deeper level, it signifies the departure of God's Spirit from the Jews'.³⁶ D. Bock concludes, however, that whichever veil is in mind, 'it suggests an opening up of access to God'.³⁷ Marshall sees the outer veil's being in view for Luke, while for Mark it may represent 'the new way into the presence of God opened up by Jesus'.³⁸ Seeming to merge two interpretations, McNeile uses the rending of the veil to somehow associate the

inner veil'. Surely, though, Matthew is not concerned so much with the physical difficulty (cf. 8:23–27; 19:26, etc.) as with the metaphorical significance and resulting theological implications, which are indeed miraculous. He need not say how large the rocks are that split, how deep the graves are that opened, nor how many saints were raised. The mere fact of the occurrence is of sufficient magnitude to inspire faith in the centurion (27:54)!

³⁰ Jackson, 'Death of Jesus in Mark', 24. Similarly Davies and Allison, *Matthew* III, p. 631.

³¹ Jackson, 'Death of Jesus in Mark', 24. He concedes, however, that the location of Golgotha on the Mount of Olives is not necessary for his exegesis of Mark 15:37–39, although it seems essential in order for the veil to be seen.

³² Jackson, 'Death of Jesus in Mark', 24; S. T. Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1987), p. 434; D. Ulansey, 'The Heavenly Veil Torn: Mark's Cosmic Inclusio', *JBL* 110 (1991), 124 and T. E. Schmidt, 'The Penetration of Barriers and the Revelation of Christ in the Gospels', *NovT* 34 (1992), 237–40. Cf. I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (NIGTC; Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), p. 875.

³³ D. L. Bock, *Luke* (BECNT; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1996) II, p. 1860. Bock's conclusion, however, is cautious, and he first highlights the lexical difficulties with any decision.

³⁴ See discussion below, p. 14.

³⁵ *Matthew* 140 (ANF VI, p. 90). A more thorough explanation of the evangelistic or 'vindication' interpretation is discussed below, pp. 7–8.

³⁶ Schmidt, 'Penetration of Barriers', 236–37.

³⁷ Bock, *Luke* II, p. 1860, n. 28. ³⁸ Marshall, *Luke*, p. 874.

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'Lord's Death, the fall of Jerusalem,³⁹ and the End of the Age', concluding that 'the rending of the veil was a warning sign (cf. *Clem. Recogn.* 1.41, "lamentans excidium loco imminens")' in addition to being a sign of mourning.⁴⁰

The fundamental difficulty with the visibility argument, as with many attempts to press the historical details, is that it does not seem to acknowledge the distinctly apocalyptic language in which the evangelist places this event. Surely Matthew, whose distinct voice is not acknowledged here, places the *velum scissum* between the death of Christ and the explicitly apocalyptic 'events' of the splitting of rocks, opening of tombs, and raising of the holy ones,⁴¹ intending the rending of the veil in some way to relate to this motif. The visibility arguments place the event in a purely historical narrative context and make no provision for Matthew's apocalyptic milieu. Indeed, L. Sabourin rightly comments 'the *interpretation* of history lies in the center of apocalyptic thought'.⁴²

1.3 The Apologetic Arguments

Scholars from the third century on have suggested a variety of what can be broadly called 'apologetic' interpretations of the *velum scissum*. They have often taken careful note of Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple (Matt. 23:38) and, seeing the rending of the veil as a symbol of temple destruction, have interpreted the event as a means of vindicating, or fulfilling, Jesus' prediction. Similarly, other scholars have suggested that the rending of the veil is simply an act of vengeance on the part of God for the unjust execution of his son. Still others have taken a slightly different approach to the 'apologetic' concept and suggested that the *velum scissum* is a sort of 'authentication', a divine 'sign' affirming that although Jesus was crucified as a felon, God is 'speaking' through the rending of the veil to affirm that Jesus is in fact who he claimed to be, God's (divine) Son. In addition to affirming the divinity of Christ, other

³⁹ Similarly, W. L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 575, comments, 'The rending of the veil is a public sign that the rejection of the Messiah by the leaders of the people discloses a failure in sensitivity to the divine purpose so serious that it seals the disaster of A.D.70. Jesus' death and the destruction of the formal structures of Judaism are inseparably bound together'.

⁴⁰ A. H. McNeile, *The Gospel according to St Matthew* (London: Macmillan, 1915), p. 423. See discussion of 'Mourning' below, pp. 17–18.

⁴¹ See Sabourin, 'Apocalyptic Traits', 19–36.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 19 (emphasis mine). Stanton (*A Gospel for a New People*, p. 2) comments, 'The evangelist writes with several strategies in mind. He intends to set out the story and significance of Jesus as a 'foundation document' for his readers: his primary aims are Christological and catechetical' (emphasis mine). The apocalyptic imagery employed by the evangelist at the rending of the veil will be explored more fully in Chapter 6.

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scholars use the *velum scissum* to argue for his humanity and for the historical reality of the sufferings he endured on the cross.

In Matthew 23:38, Jesus is recorded as saying ἰδοὺ ἀφίεται ὑμῖν ὁ οἶκος ὑμῶν ἔρημος,⁴³ a saying which many ancient and modern scholars intuitively associate with the *velum scissum*.⁴⁴ This interpretation comes in a variety of combinations normally associated with the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 C.E., including pure vindication of prophecies whether they are Old Testament prophecies⁴⁵ or Jesus' prediction in 23:38 and elsewhere⁴⁶; a combination of this vindication with judgment/retaliation on the part of God⁴⁷;

⁴³ See Luke 13:35. The possible allusions to Isa. 5:9, 24:10; Jer. 26:9, 33:10–12; Ezek. 35:14–15 will be addressed in Chapter 5.

⁴⁴ *Const. ap.* (c. 350–400) 6.5.26; Eusebius, *Dem. ev.*, 8.2.116.4; *Catena in Marcum* 440.26, 441.8; John Chrysostom (c. 347–407), *Hom. Jo.* 59.361.41; *Cruc.* 10.15; *Trid. Res.* 50.824.19–20; Ps.-Macarius, *Hom. sp.*, 50.4.331; John Philoponus, *De opificio* 97.5, refers to the tearing of the veil as a τὰ εἰρημέναι σημεῖα; Ps.-Macarius *Serm.* 64.49.5.3.3; see Catecheses ad illuminandos 13.32.19.

⁴⁵ Cyril of Alexandria, *Fr. Acta et Ep. Cath.* 74.760.27 (of Joel 2:31 in Acts 2:20); *Comm. Minor Proph.* 1.341.22 (of Joel 2:31); Eusebius, *Dem. ev.* 8.2.112.3 (Dan. 9:27); Tertullian (fl. c. 200), *Marc.* 4.42 (of Amos 8:9; Ezek. 11:22, 23; Isa. 1:8); C. G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels* (3 vols.; London: Macmillan, 1909) II, p. 744 (of Ezek. 37:12); Cf. also Eusebius, *Dem. ev.* 6.18.41.3; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech. illum.* 13.32.19–33.1; Cyril of Alexandria, *Fr.* 315, *On Matt.* 27:51.

⁴⁶ Eusebius, *Fr. Luc.*, 24.605.29; *Dem. ev.* 6.18.41.3; A. Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Matthäus: Seine Sprache, sein Ziel, seine Selbständigkeit* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1957), pp. 783–84; J. P. Heil, *The Death and Resurrection of Jesus: A Narrative-Critical Reading of Matthew 26–28* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1991), p. 85. Curiously, few have looked to Jesus' prediction in 24:2.

⁴⁷ R. Hummel, *Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Kirche und Judentum im Matthäusevangelium* (München: Kaiser, 1966), pp. 84–85; U. Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (trans. J. B. Robinson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 136; J. Lange, *Das Erscheinen des Auferstandenen im Evangelium nach Matthäus: Eine traditions- und redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Mt 28, 16–20* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1973), pp. 337–38; D. Patte, *The Gospel according to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1987), p. 390; J. D. Kingsbury, *Matthew* (PC; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1986), p. 55. Cf. Dahl ('The Passion Narrative in Matthew', p. 63), who combines views saying, 'The rending of the temple veil signifies the end of the earthly temple service and judgment upon Judaism. (Also, the providing of access to God? Cf. Heb. 10:19f)'. M. Davies, *Matthew* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), pp. 198–99, suggests it refers to 'the human and theological significance of [Jesus'] death', a 'graphic intimation of the temple's profanation', which 'reminds the readers of Jesus' prophecy about the temple's destruction' (24:2). It also 'represents the endorsement of Jesus' fidelity and God's warning to his enemies'. For Luke, E. E. Ellis, ed., *The Gospel of Luke* (NCB; London: Nelson, 1966), p. 269, lists the prediction of the temple destruction (Luke 21:5–38), Christ opening the way to God for all people (Luke 23:43), and the cessation of 'temple rites' as the necessary means 'for the true worship of God' all as being in view. See K. Stendahl, 'Matthew', in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (ed. M. Black and H. H. Rowley; London: Nelson, 1962), p. 797. Perhaps also, E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus* (12th edn; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953), p. 347. See Origen, *Fr. Luc* 151.4; Jerome *Ep.* 46; J. T. Carroll and J. B. Green, *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), p. 47.

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or simply pure judgment in response to the execution of God's Son.⁴⁸

These often complicated and overlapping views have recently been summarised by Davies and Allison, who for a variety of such reasons prefer to relate the tearing of the veil to the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E.⁴⁹ In addition to Matt. 23:38, they look to Matt. 27:40, where passers-by speak of Jesus' alleged claim that he would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. They conclude that 'it is most appropriate that, immediately after people mock Jesus for his prophecy about the temple (v. 40), his words should be vindicated'.⁵⁰

Although many in this category see the *velum scissum* as a sign of judgment in some sense, ancient scholars particularly specify the means by which the veil was rent. Some have apparently drawn from a tradition not unlike that of Tacitus (*Hist.* 5.13), who records reports that during the 70 C.E. siege of Jerusalem, 'the doors of the shrine (temple) opened and a superhuman voice cried: "The gods are departing": at the same moment a mighty stir of their going was heard'.⁵¹ Some have understood the association of this tradition with the rending of the veil as depicting abandonment. It normally involves an angel abandoning its role of protecting Israel.⁵² Others have stated that what has departed from the temple, again in judgment, is either the Holy Spirit or even God himself.⁵³

In a classic 'apologetic' sense, some, especially ancient scholars, have proposed that the *velum scissum*, being a miraculous event of divine

⁴⁸ Georgius Cedrenus, *Comp. hist.* 1.482.19; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 656–57. Seemingly also, Sim, *Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, p. 226; R. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), p. 330; R. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (2 vols.; New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1994) II, p. 1100; perhaps also A. Schlatter, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1947), p. 415.

⁴⁹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew III*, p. 631.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, III, p. 630. The texts they cite for support, however (II, p. 630, n. 100; Tertullian, *Marc.* 4.42; Chrysostom, *Hom. Matt.* 88.2), say nothing about the identity of the veil but rather allude to the concept of judgment only.

⁵¹ Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.13 (LCL).

⁵² Tertullian, *Marc.* 4.42; Hilary, *Comm. Matt.* 33.7; *Hom. Ps.* 57.10; Melito of Sardis, *Pasch.* 98.

⁵³ Tertullian, *Adv. Jud.* 13.15; *Const. ap.* (c. 350–400), 6.5.26; Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 3.2; Isho'dad of Merv (c. 850 C.E.); Isho'dad of Merv, *The Commentaries of Isho'dad of Merv: Bishop of Hadatha (c. 850 A.D.) in Syriac and English*, vol. 2, *Matthew and Mark in Syriac* (trans. and ed. M. D. Gibson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), pp. 113–114, using *עֲדָן*, probably 'gate' or 'door', but is also the standard (Peshitta) term for the Hebrew פֶּרֶזְיָה 'inner veil' (cf. Appendix), and is likewise used in the Syriac of Matt. 27:51a; Ps.-Macarius, *Sermones* 64.16.3.5.2; John Chrysostom, *Cruc.* 10.15; Ephraem the Syrian, *Serm. pass.*, 36.2 (presumably his reference to the departure of a dove is symbolic of the Holy Spirit).

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10 Introduction

origin, is therefore a witness or declaration of the divinity of Christ,⁵⁴ which is itself sufficient grounds for faith.⁵⁵ It is also cited as historical evidence for the reality of Christ's crucifixion.⁵⁶ Interpretations of these arguments are too diverse to discuss in full here, and some of them, as is often the case with discussions of the *velum scissum*, are mere interpretations, with less apparent methodological rationale than many modern scholars would find adequate. Moreover, they rarely give careful attention to each of the respective synoptic contexts, and none do so for Matthew. According to Ephraem the Syrian, the veil was among the innocent sufferers for the sins of humanity.⁵⁷ Cyril of Alexandria declares that the rending of the veil marks the advent of the 'great day of the Lord' from Joel 2:30–31.⁵⁸ Eusebius represents the rending of the veil as the stripping away of the old covenant (ἡ κατὰ Μωσέα παλαιὰ διαθήκη περιήρητο).⁵⁹ Tertullian argues that the *velum scissum* demonstrates that it is Christ who is the 'true temple'.⁶⁰ Melito of Sardis sees the rending of the veil as a sign of mourning.⁶¹ For R. Brown, the 'sanctuary as such went out of existence; the building that continued to stand there was not a holy place'.⁶²

⁵⁴ Origen, *Cels.* 2.33; *Concilia Oecumenica, Concil. Univ.* 431, 1.1.5.89.37; Epiphanius *Hom. div.*, 43.445.27; Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 19, 16; §-103; Arnobius, *Against the Heathen* 53; John Chrysostom, *Oratio de hypapante* 66.1; *Scand.*, 20.9.1; *Exp. Ps.*, 55.210.44; *Precatio* 64.1065.26; Athanasius (c. 296–373), *Homilia de passione et cruce domini* (additamenta), 28.249.18; *Homilia in illud: Ite in castellum* 7.4.1; Athanasius, *Quaest. Script.* 28.725.17; Ephraem the Syrian, *Serm. trans.*, 7.4; Stendahl, 'Matthew', p. 797; H. Wansbrough, 'Matthew', in *Matthew and Mark* (SDC 7; London: Sheed & Ward, 1971), p. 241; perhaps also Gregory Nazianzus, *Pasch.*, 36.661.45; M. Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (trans. B. L. Woolf; Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1971), p. 195; R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 575.

⁵⁵ Jerome (from Aquinas, *Catena Aurea* 1.963); Leo, *Serm. de Pass.* (from Aquinas, *Catena Aurea* 1.963); Michael Psellus, *Orationes hagiographicae* 3b.60.

⁵⁶ Eusebius, *Ecl. Proph.* 164.1; *Comm. Ps.*, 23.729.46; *Hist. ecc.* 3.8.1–9; *Dem. ev.* 19; *Ecl. Proph.* 3.48; Perhaps also Georgius Acropolites, *Carm. Sabb.*, 7; John Chrysostom, *Orat. Hyp.*, 74.7; G. Dalman, *Jesus-Jeshua: Studies in the Gospels* (trans. P. P. Levertoff; London: SPCK, 1928), p. 220; Athanasius, *Hom. pass.*, 28.249.18.

⁵⁷ *Sermo asceticus*, 125.8.

⁵⁸ *Comm. Minor Proph.*, 1.341.22. He also sees the rending as symbolic of the fate of those who incurred Christ's sufferings. Moreover, it is symbolic of the passing away of the old temple and the opening up of the holy of holies 'τοῖς διὰ πίστεως τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν δεδικτωμένοις', who can then follow in Christ's footsteps. *Comm. Mat.* 27.51, Fr. 315; Cf. J. Reuss, *Matthäus-Kommentare aus der griechischen Kirche* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957), pp. 266–67.

⁵⁹ *Dem. ev.*, 8.2.119.8. Similarly, H. N. Ridderbos, *Matthew's Witness to Jesus Christ: The King and the Kingdom* (New York, N.Y.: Association Press, 1958), p. 87, sees a new creation motif.

⁶⁰ Tertullian, *Adv. Jud.*, 13.15.

⁶¹ *Pasch.* 98, cf. discussion of Daube below, pp. 17–18. ⁶² Brown, *Death II*, p. 1102.