

SOMETHING AWRY IN THE TEMPLE? THE RENDING OF THE TEMPLE VEIL AND EARLY JEWISH SOURCES THAT REPORT UNUSUAL PHENOMENA IN THE TEMPLE AROUND AD 30

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I. INTRODUCTION

When Jesus died on the cross, the Gospels report that the veil of the temple was torn in half (Matt 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). While believing Christians take on faith that this event actually happened, can extra-biblical confirmation also be given for the incident?¹ That is, can non-biblical writings demonstrate that Jesus' unbelieving contemporaries acknowledged that miraculous portents occurred in the Jewish temple around the year AD 30?²

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¹ Theodore Zahn defended the historicity of the veil's rending, but I am not aware of any other articles that focus solely on this topic during the last one hundred years (Theodore Zahn, "Der zerrissene Tempelvorhang," *NKZ* 13 [1902] 729–56). Among other arguments, Zahn attempts to connect the veil rending in the Synoptics with the breaking of the temple lintel in the *Gospel of the Nazarenes* (frags. 21, 36 [NTApoc 1.162, 164]), as cited in Jerome. Jerome writes, "In euangelio autem, quad Hebraicis litteris scriptum est, legimus non uelum templi scissum, sed superliminare templi mirae magnitudinis conruiisse (*Ep. 120.8 ad Hedybiam* [CSEL 55, p. 490]). Similarly, in his commentary on Matthew, Jerome writes, "In euangelio cuius saepe facimus mentionem superliminare templi infinitae magnitudinis fractum esse atque diuisum legimus" (*Comm. Mt. on 27:51* [CC 77, p. 275]). Strack and Billerbeck cite some of the ancient sources mentioned later in this article, but are skeptical of their historical value (Str-B 1.1043–46). H. W. Montefiore suggests that the same historical incident underlies the report of oddities in the temple made by the Synoptic Gospels, Josephus's *Wars of the Jews*, the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, Tacitus's *Histories*, and the Jerusalem Talmud ("Josephus and the New Testament," *NovT* 4 [1960] 148–54). S. V. McCasland sees evidence for early Palestinian traditions (not later Greco-Roman literary inventions) behind the report of portents in Josephus and in the Synoptic Gospels ("Portents in Josephus and the Gospels," *JBL* 51 [1932] 323–35).

² Among many scholars, the rending of the temple veil and other supernatural events reported at Jesus' death are considered non-historical poetic or apocalyptic imagery (e.g. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: Commentary on Matthew XIX–XXVIII* [ICC 3; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997] 632; Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X–XXIV* [AB 28A; New York: Doubleday, 1985] 1513–14; W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* [AB 26; New York: Doubleday, 1971] 351–52; Raymond E. Brown, "Eschatological Events Accompanying the Death of Jesus, Especially the Raising of the Holy Ones from Their Tombs (Matt 27:51–53)," in *Faith and the Future* [ed. John P. Galvin; Studies in Christian Eschatology; New York: Paulist, 1994] 43, 57, 63; W. G. Essame, "Matthew xxvii. 51–54 and John v. 25–29," *ExpTim* 76 [1964–65] 103). The supernatural events reported at Jesus' death are frequently seen as parallel to other-worldly phenomena mentioned in ancient non-biblical writings that describe the death of well-known persons (e.g. Josephus, *Ant.* 17.167; Philo, *De Providentia* 2.50; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 2.30; Virgil, *Geor.* 1.461–71; Plutarch, *Caes.* 69; Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 56.29.2–3). Evidence from early Jewish literature supporting the historicity of the veil's rending,

To discover what Jesus' non-believing contemporaries were saying about the temple in AD 30, we must examine early non-biblical Jewish literature.³ We will be approaching the literature with this one question: do these early Jewish sources provide any corroborating evidence for the historicity of the rending of the temple veil?⁴ First, I will briefly examine the NT passages that provide the basis for our question. Second, I will survey some of the early non-biblical sources pertinent to our investigation. Third, I will draw some tentative conclusions.

II. NEW TESTAMENT

The passage that provides the basis for our question is found, in some form, in all three Synoptic Gospels. The Gospels report that when Jesus died, the *καταπέτασμα* of the temple was torn in half (Matt 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). Scholars debate whether this *καταπέτασμα* was the curtain which cordoned off the Holy of Holies (*J.W.* 5.219) or whether it was the veil which separated the sanctuary from the outer courts (*J.W.* 5.212–14).⁵ Some early Jewish sources indicate that there were in fact two curtains at the entrance to the Holy of Holies.⁶ If there were two curtains and the Gospel authors

if even mentioned by commentators, is usually passed over quickly (e.g. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002] 657; Davies and Allison, *Matthew* 630–31; Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20* [WBC 34B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001] 509; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28* [WBC 33B; Dallas: Word, 1995] 848–49; Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993] 971; Fitzmeyer, *Luke X–XXIV* 1518–19; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* [PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1992] 724 n. 99; William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* [NICNT 2; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974] 575, n. 79; Albright and Mann, *Matthew* 352; Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew* [NAC 22; Nashville: Broadman, 1992] 421; D. A. Carson, *Matthew* [EBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995] 580).

³ These sources have already proved quite fruitful for the study of the NT. Through citations of the Talmud, for example, one can show that early Jewish traditions viewed Jesus as an illegitimate child, a sorcerer, a gatherer of disciples, and a blasphemer who died through crucifixion (*b. Shab.* 104b [12:5], *b. Sanh.* 43a [6:1H–J], 67a [7:10A–N], see uncensored editions of the Talmud), 107b [11:2]). These descriptions are the very perspective that we find on the lips of Jesus' opponents in the Gospels (Matt 26:65; Luke 11:15; John 8:41). Similarly, the early Jewish historian Josephus confirms the identity and character of several NT personages—e.g. James the Just, John the Baptist, Herod the Great, and most famously, though most textually suspect, Jesus (*Ant.* 14.324–491, 18.63–64, 18.116–17, 20.200). Numerous other citations from scores of Jewish documents could be mentioned.

⁴ It is widely recognized that non-biblical Jewish sources provide additional pre-AD 70 expectations of the temple's destruction (Craig A. Evans, "Predictions of the Destruction of the Herodian Temple in the Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Scrolls, and Related Texts," *JSP* 10 [1992] 89–147). Specific parallels with the rending of the temple veil, however, have been neglected.

⁵ For a summary of this discussion, see Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53* (BECNT 3B; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 1860–61.

⁶ *m. Yoma* 5:1; *m. Mid.* 4:7; *y. Yoma* 5:1–2. See John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica, Volume 2: Matthew–Mark* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859; repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997) 369–70. Carl Schneider notes that scholars debate whether there were one or two curtains before the Holy of Holies ("καταπέτασμα," *TDNT* 3.629). For

were referring to this inner barrier, it is possible that the evangelists intended us to understand that both of them were torn. For the remainder of the paper, I will refer to a singular “curtain” or “veil” with the understanding that this could have referred to one inner curtain, two inner curtains, or one outer curtain.⁷ For our study, the assertion that a cloth barrier in the temple was torn apart from human agency is more important than pinpointing exactly which curtain (or how many curtains) were torn.⁸

Scholars also debate whether in the theology of the evangelists this rending of the temple veil is more indicative of the new access that all believers have to God through Christ, or symbolic of the departure of God’s blessing and the impending destruction that will come upon the temple.⁹ For the purposes of our historical inquiry, this question can be set aside.¹⁰

detailed background on the curtain conundrum in light of conflicting ancient sources, see S. Lé-gasse, “Les voiles du temple de Jérusalem: Essai de parcours historique,” *RB* 87 (1980) 560–89; Harry E. Faber van der Meulen, “One or Two Veils in Front of the Holy of Holies?” *Theologia Evangelica* 18 (1985) 22–27. For a brief historical tracing from tabernacle to Second Temple interspersed with a typological hermeneutic, see Tim Hegg, “Separating the Most Holy from the Holy: The ‘Veil’ in the Tabernacle and First & Second Temples,” a paper presented at the 2000 Northwest regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Portland, Oregon. The paper is available online at www.TorahResource.com.

⁷ The lexical evidence for καταπέτασμα and ναός is inconclusive (so France, *Mark* 656; Evans, *Mark* 8:27–16:20 510; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978] 875). Contra James R. Edwards, who overstates the evidence in concluding, “On linguistic grounds the torn *katapetasma* of v. 38 would appear to be the curtain before the Holy of Holies” (*The Gospel According to Mark* [PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Leicester: Apollon, 2002] 478). Carl Schneider opts for the inner curtain, but not on lexical grounds. He writes, “The Evangelists are almost certainly thinking of the inner curtain, since the other had no great significance. The underlying conception is that the death of Jesus opened up access to the holy of holies” (“καταπέτασμα,” *TDNT* 3.629–30).

⁸ The debate is ongoing. David Ulansey argues that the literary *inclusio* of the divine tearing in Mark 1:10 (σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανοὺς) and Mark 15:38 (τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ ἐσχίσθη εἰς δύο) favors understanding the latter as a reference to the outer veil, which Josephus says was woven with celestial designs (*J.W.* 5.212–14) (“The Heavenly Veil Torn: Mark’s Cosmic *Inclusio*,” *JBL* 110 [1991] 123–25). S. Motyer argues for the literary *inclusio* of Mark 1:9–11 and 15:38, but only briefly signals his opinion that the outer curtain is intended (“The Rending of the Veil: A Markan Pentecost?” *NTS* 33 [1987] 157 n. 2). Motyer argues the event is “a Markan Pentecost, a proleptic bestowal of the Spirit analogous to the proleptic destruction of the Temple” (p. 155). Similarly, Thomas E. Schmidt sees the rending of the temple veil as a part of a larger “divine penetration” theme found in all four gospels (“The Penetration of Barriers and the Revelation of Christ in the Gospels,” *NovT* 34 [1992] 229–46).

⁹ For a brief presentation of these and other views, see Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53* 1860–61. Scholars who take the veil rending as a sign of judgment include: Sunik Hwang, “Matthew’s View of the Temple” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002) 145; Marshall, *Luke* 875; France, *Mark* 657; Lane, *Mark* 575; Davies and Allison, *Matthew* 631; R. Brown, “Eschatological Events Accompanying the Death of Jesus” 68 n. 4; Andries G. Van Aarde, “Matthew 27:45–53 and the Turning of the Tide in Israel’s History,” *BTB* 28 (1998) 23–24. Gösta Lindeskog speculates about the theological viewpoint of the pre-Synoptic source that he thinks underlies the reference to the temple veil in both the Gospels and Hebrews. One cannot, of course, doubt soteriological connotations in the Hebrews passages (Heb 6:19; 9:3; 10:20). Lindeskog concludes, “The fundamental idea [of the veil tearing] is an early Christian *theologoumenon* implying that the death of Christ on the Cross opens the Gate to Heaven” (Gösta Lindeskog, “The Veil of the Temple,” in *Coniectanea Neotestamentica XI in honorem Antonii Fridrichsen Sexagenarii* [Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1947] 134).

It is also important to note that all three Synoptic Gospels report that on the day of Jesus' crucifixion, the sun was darkened from the sixth to the ninth hour, i.e. from noon until 3 p.m. (Matt 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44–45).¹¹ Luke places this information about the sun immediately before he speaks of the temple curtain being torn, though there is no direct temporal relation indicated in the text.¹²

Similarly, see the forthcoming dissertation by Tsen-Jen Wu ("Sanctuary Imagery in Hebrews 10:19–20 as a Reflection of Early Christians' Understanding of Christ's Priesthood" [Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary]). While acknowledging the tearing of the veil as a divine signifier of the temple's disqualification, Harry L. Chronis also seeks to defend a Christological, revelatory function: "In [Jesus'] death, which culminates his mission of rejection and suffering (and thus satisfies the need for secrecy), Jesus manifests his true identity; and the effect, according to Mark, is equivalent to God himself showing his 'face'" ("The Torn Veil: Cultus and Christology in Mark 15:37–39," *JBL* 101 [1982] 110). Of course, in determining the meaning of the temple veil rending, one must consider the redactional clues of the individual evangelists. For a somewhat dated survey of various interpretations of the incident in Mark, see Paul Lamarche, "La mort du Christ et le voile du temple," *NRT* 96 (1974) 583–99. For a list of thirty-five different interpretations of the veil rending in Mark, see Timothy J. Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* (JSNTSS 26; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989) 141–43. S. Motyer thinks that Mark intends for the incident to signify both the coming destruction of the temple and new access to God through Christ's death ("The Rending of the Veil" 157 n. 3). In noting Lukan redactional changes to his Markan source, Dennis D. Sylva argues, ". . . Luke's purpose in Luke 23:45b, 46a was not to signify the temple's destruction, the abrogation of the temple cultus, or the opening of a new way to God, but rather to present the last moment of Jesus' life as a communion with the God of the temple" ("The Temple Curtain and Jesus' Death in the Gospel of Luke," *JBL* 105 [1986] 250). David E. Garland offers a thoughtful presentation of possible meanings of the curtain tearing in the Gospel of Matthew (*Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel* [New York: Crossroad, 1993] 260–61). Many recent commentators are more reticent to offer dogmatic interpretations of the curtain's rending (e.g. R. T. France, *Mark* 658; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew* [trans. Robert R. Barr; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002] 289–90; Robert H. Stein, *Luke* [NAC 24; Nashville: Broadman, 1992] 595–96; Gundry, *Mark* 970–72). For current discussions of the theological significance of the rending of the temple veil see Daniel M. Gurtner, "The Rending of the Veil (Matt. 27:51a par): A Look Back and a Way Forward," *Them* 29 (2004) 4–14; *idem*, "Functionality, Identity, and Interpretation: The Tearing of the Temple Curtain (Matt 27:51 par) in Light of Pentateuchal Tabernacle Texts," a paper presented at the 2003 national meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Atlanta, GA. Gurtner has recently completed a dissertation under the supervision of Richard Bauckham at the University of St. Andrews that deals with these matters in greater detail. For more information on his thesis, see www.geocities.com/dgurtner.

¹⁰ For a survey of early Christian views on the meaning of the rending of the temple curtain in Matthew, see M. de Jonge, "Matthew 27:51 in Early Christian Exegesis," *HTR* 79 (1986) 67–79. Even among early commentators, de Jonge notes that "we find an astonishing variety of viewpoints" (p. 74). He concludes, "Perhaps . . . the scrutiny of early Christian material will induce modern exegetes to review their own interpretations critically and to present them with the utmost modesty. Many of them are not all that new, and all of them are tenuous" (p. 79).

¹¹ Thallus, a Gentile historian who wrote around AD 52, apparently acknowledged this darkening of the sun as a factual event, but attempted to explain it away as an eclipse (as recorded in Julius Africanus, *The Extant Fragments of the Five Books of the Chronography*, section 18 (ANF 6:136) [ca. AD 221]). The *Gospel of Peter* 5:15 and *Acts of Pilate*, chapter 11, record similar references to the darkening of the sun during Jesus' crucifixion.

¹² Luke 23:45 reads: τοῦ ἡλίου ἐκλιπόντος, ἐσχίσθη δὲ τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ μέσον. Commentators frequently note that Luke describes the temple veil rending prior to reporting Jesus' death,

Matthew is the only canonical source to mention a few additional supernatural phenomena that accompanied the rending of the temple veil.¹³ In Matt 27:50–53, we read this fuller account:

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.¹⁴

In this extended narrative, Matthew reports an earthquake that apparently accompanied (and may have indirectly caused) the tearing of the temple curtain. During this earthquake, not only were rocks split, but tombs were opened and some of God's people from previous times were resurrected.¹⁵

So, in summary, at the death of Jesus, the Gospel authors report at least four supernatural phenomena that were possibly related:

- (1) the darkening of the sun from the sixth until the ninth hour;
- (2) the tearing of the temple curtain;
- (3) the resurrection of dead saints;
- (4) an earthquake, which may have indirectly caused the tearing of the temple curtain and resulted in the tombs of resurrected persons being opened.

while Mark and Matthew report the veil rending after narrating Jesus' death. Joel B. Green examines the peculiarities of Luke's account of the veil rending as a window into the broader temple theology of Luke-Acts. Green concludes, ". . . in the torn veil Luke has already demonstrated symbolically that the holiness-purity matrix embodied in and emanating from the temple has been undermined" ("The Demise of the Temple as 'Culture Center' in Luke-Acts: An Exploration of the Rending of the Temple Veil [Luke 23.44–49]," *RB* 101 [1994] 515). Paul-Gerhard Klumbies argues that Luke's use of the term *θεοπία* in 23:48 likely indicates the evangelist's depiction of Jesus' death in a dramatic fashion influenced by the Greco-Roman theater ("Das Sterben Jesu als Schauspiel nach Lk 23,44–49," *BZ* 47 [2003] 186–205).

¹³ Much discussion has been prompted by Matthew's more extensive description of supernatural phenomena accompanying the death of Jesus. E.g. Ingrid Maisch, "Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu. Zur Osterverkündigung in Mt 27,51–54," in *Auferstehung Jesu–Auferstehung der Christen. Deutungen des Osterglaubens* (ed. Lorenz Oberlinner; QD 105; Freiburg: Herder, 1986) 96–123; Donald Senior, "The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Mt 27:51–53)," *CBQ* 38 (1976) 312–29; J. W. Wenham, "When Were the Saints Raised? A Note on the Punctuation of Matthew xxvii. 51–3," *JTS* 32 (1981) 150–52; Ronald L. Troxel, "Matt 27.51–4 Reconsidered: Its Role in the Passion Narrative, Meaning and Origin," *NTS* 48 (2002) 30–47.

¹⁴ English Scripture quotations are taken from the NASB unless otherwise noted.

¹⁵ Kenneth L. Waters, Sr., argues that Matthew 27:52–53 (i.e. the resurrection of dead saints and accompanying signs) refers to a future general resurrection at the end of time ("Matthew 27:52–53 as Apocalyptic Apostrophe: Temporal-Spatial Collapse in the Gospel of Matthew," *JBL* 122 [2003] 489–515). Ronald L. Troxel believes that the unique material of Matt 27:52–53 is a Matthean creation for literary effect, drawing upon *I Enoch* 93:6, "where 'visions of the Holy Ones' accompany the gift of the Torah" ("Matt 27.51–4 Reconsidered" 30). According to Troxel, "Matthew utilized this motif from the Mosaic era not to infuse Jesus' death with eschatological significance, but to provoke the centurion's acclamation of Jesus as 'son of God' as the climax of the crucifixion narrative" (p. 30).

Do extra-biblical sources report these events (or similar phenomena) occurring around the date of Jesus' death? Following Jesus' death, in the weeks and months ahead, did unusual phenomena continue in the temple—to indicate either that it was obsolete or that its destruction was imminent? For the remainder of this paper we will seek to answer these questions by looking at early Jewish sources which seem to provide some corroborating evidence for supernatural phenomena in the temple at the time of, or following, Christ's crucifixion.

III. NON-BIBLICAL JEWISH SOURCES

1. *Jerusalem Talmud*.¹⁶ Possibly the most significant corroborating sources for unusual phenomena in the temple around the time of Christ's crucifixion are the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud. These sources are important because they explicitly indicate a time reference that corresponds to the date of Jesus' crucifixion. Also, as sources preserved by rabbinic Judaism, the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud do not face the charge of being tainted by later Christian interpolations. We will look first at the Jerusalem Talmud.

In Tractate *Yoma* 6:3 we read:

It has been taught: Forty years before the destruction of the Temple the western light went out, the crimson thread remained crimson, and the lot for the Lord always came up in the left hand. They would close the gates of the Temple by night and get up in the morning and find them wide open. Said [to the Temple] Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, "O Temple, why do you frighten us? We know that you will end up destroyed. For it has been said, 'Open your doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour your cedars!'" (Zech 11:1).¹⁷

Several things should be noted about this significant passage. First, the unusual events reported in the temple are dated to "forty years" before the temple was destroyed—that is, around AD 30—the time of Jesus' crucifixion.¹⁸ Second, the tradition in the Talmud identifies four supernatural phenomena

¹⁶ The Jerusalem Talmud was completed around AD 400–425 and contains rabbinic oral traditions dating back to pre-Christian times. For further information, see Craig A. Evans, *Noncanonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992) 126.

¹⁷ English translation by Jacob Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: An Academic Commentary to the Second, Third and Fourth Divisions, IV. Yerushalmi Tractate Yoma* (South Florida Academic Commentary Series 112; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998) 148.

¹⁸ Whether Jesus was crucified in AD 30 or AD 33, "forty years" would still be an accurate round number to describe the distance between his death and the destruction of the temple. For a discussion of the dating of Jesus' crucifixion, see W. P. Armstrong and J. Finegan, "Chronology of the New Testament," *ISBE* 1.689; G. B. Caird, "Chronology of the New Testament, The," *IDB* 1.602–3; Eugen Ruckstuhl, *Chronology of the Last Days of Jesus: A Critical Study* (trans. Victor J. Drapela; New York: Desclee, 1965) 1–9. Rabbinic chronologies favor numbers of biblical significance (e.g. forty), so possibly we should not read the number too literally. Robert H. Gundry voices his skepticism: "Since forty years appears stereotypically in the OT, the coincidence of forty years before the destruction of the temple and a possible year of Jesus' death holds doubtful significance" (*Mark* 971).

that seem to indicate that the temple is malfunctioning or that God's blessing has been withdrawn. We will now briefly list and comment on these four phenomena:

- (a) The "western light" went out on its own in an uncanny manner. According to the Talmud, this "western light" or "western lamp" (נר מערבי or נר אלהים, 1 Sam 3:3) was the center lamp of the Menorah (or candelabrum). Although the designation "western light" for a center lamp may seem a bit odd to us, the lamp was described as "western" because of its position to the west of the lamp branches on the east side.¹⁹ According to rabbinic tradition, this "western lamp" remained lit long beyond the normally expected time—miraculously indicating God's blessing and/or presence.²⁰ Accordingly, the regular self-extinguishing of the main lamp in the temple we find described in the Jerusalem Talmud above would seem to indicate a departure of God's presence or lack of his blessing.
- (b) A thread which supernaturally changed from a crimson color to white on the Day of Atonement (as recorded in post-OT Jewish tradition) ceased to do so.²¹ The thread's miraculous change in color was thought to display symbolically God's fulfillment of his promise in Isa 1:18, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool."²² The cessation of this miraculous event seems to imply that the rituals on the Day of Atonement were not effectively dealing with people's sins.
- (c) On the Day of Atonement, when lots were cast (one lot for the Lord and one for the scapegoat—see Lev 16:8), the lot for the Lord always came up in the left hand. Over a number of years, this consistently inauspicious result was recognized as a disturbing variance from the normal statistical expectation.²³ Significantly, rabbinic tradition also reports that at an earlier time, the lot for the Lord always came up in the right hand as a sign of God's favor.²⁴
- (d) The gates of the temple opened at night on their own in an inexplicable manner. This unusual pattern seems to demonstrate either a departure of God's presence, an invitation to invaders, or both. The Talmudic tradition clearly presents the event as a portent of coming destruction, as the following passage indicates, where we read that Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai addresses the temple with these words: "O Temple, why do you frighten us? We know that you will end up destroyed. For it has been said, 'Open your doors, O Lebanon, that

¹⁹ See Cyrus Adler and J. D. Eisenstein, "Menorah," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (vol. 8; New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1904, 1910) 493–95. This classic reference is now available on the internet at www.jewishencyclopedia.com.

²⁰ *b. Men.* 9:5.

²¹ *m. Yoma* 6:8.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ For extensive rabbinic description of this lot-casting ceremony, see *b. Yoma* 4:1.

²⁴ *b. Yoma* 4:1.

the fire may devour your cedars!” (Zech 11:1).²⁵ Although no curtain is mentioned here in the Talmud, the tradition of gates being opened apart from any human intervention is possibly conceptually the closest to the supernatural opening of a temple veil.

It should be noted that in the broader context, the Talmud associates these unusual phenomena in the temple with the death of Simeon the Righteous. For example, earlier in Tractate *Yoma*, we read,

All the time that Simeon the Righteous was alive, the western lamp would burn well. When Simeon the Righteous died, sometimes it would flicker out, and sometimes it would burn.²⁶

Other texts associated with Simeon the Righteous note that after his death, the amount of wood required to feed the regular wood-offering increased dramatically. (That is, the fire no longer burned under the supernatural blessing of God.) Also, prior to Simeon’s death, the food allowances for the priests were abundant, but after his death, each priest only received “bread the size of a bean.”²⁷

There is one major problem, of course, in connecting these events which the Talmud dates to AD 30 with Simeon the Righteous. Traditionally, the title “Simeon the Righteous” or “Simon the Just” is associated with the high priest Simon II who lived around 200 BC and was succeeded by Onias III.²⁸ In fact, the more one investigates references to Simeon the Righteous throughout the rabbinic writings, the more confusing it becomes as to which historical period he belongs.

There are at least five high priestly figures named Simon or Simeon in the Jewish traditions. It is not difficult to see how the moniker “the Righteous” could be affixed to several people named Simeon who served as high priest. One can see how multiple traditions about a high priest named Simeon could be confused as they were passed down orally over hundreds of years. The article on “Simeon the Righteous” in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* offers a similar assessment of the muddled traditions.²⁹

Regardless of Simeon’s exact identity, the events dated to AD 30 and associated with his name are definitely unusual. Even viewing the phenom-

²⁵ y. *Yoma* 6:3.

²⁶ y. *Yoma* 6:3. Translation by Neusner, *Yerushalmi Tractate Yoma* 147.

²⁷ y. *Yoma* 6:3. In this tractate we read, “There was a story about a priest in Sepphoris, who grabbed his share [of bread] and the share of his fellow, and they called him ‘Son of the Bean,’ to this day” (Neusner’s translation, *Yerushalmi Tractate Yoma*, 147). It appears that I unwittingly turned up the original “Mr. Bean” in my research.

²⁸ F. F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations: From the Exodus to the Fall of the Second Temple* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 128–35, 234. James C. VanderKam takes a minority position in arguing that Simon the Just is not Simon II, but Simon I of nearly a century earlier (“Simon the Just: Simon I or Simon II?” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* [ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995] 303–18).

²⁹ Wilhelm Bacher and Schulim Ochser, “Simeon the Just,” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (vol. 11; New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1905, 1909) 352. Uriel Rappaport agrees that early Jewish sources present conflicting chronological information about Simeon the Righteous (“Simeon the Just,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica* [vol. 14; Jerusalem: Keter; New York: Macmillan, 1971] 1566–67).

ena reported in the Jerusalem Talmud with a healthy degree of historical skepticism, one must admit that there is a striking correlation between the Talmud's dating of the events reported and the dating of Jesus' death on the cross.³⁰

2. *Babylonian Talmud*.³¹ Applying the form-critical principle of multiple attestation, the Babylonian Talmud provides additional evidence for supernatural phenomena in the temple around AD 30.

In Tractate *Yoma* 4:1 of the Babylonian Talmud, we find this report:

Our rabbis have taught on Tannaite authority: Forty years before the destruction of the sanctuary, the lot did not come up in the right hand, and the thread of crimson never turned white, and the westernmost light never shone, and the doors of the courtyard would open by themselves.³²

In the Babylonian Talmud, these traditions are also associated with expectations of the temple's destruction and with the death of Simeon the Righteous. In addition to repeating much of the same information from the Jerusalem Talmud discussed above, the Babylonian Talmud reports this additional story:

Our rabbis have taught on Tannaite authority: In the year in which Simeon the Righteous died, he said to them that in that year he would die. They said to him, "How do you know?" He said to them, "Every Day of Atonement an old man dressed in white and cloaked in white appears to me, who enters with me and goes forth with me [to and from the Holy of Holies], while this year an old man appeared to me dressed in black and cloaked in black, who went in with me but did not come out with me." After the festival of Tabernacles, he fell ill for seven days, and then he died. His brothers the priests refused to pronounce the divine name when bestowing the priestly benediction.³³

Immediately following this passage is the statement about the signs that preceded the temple's destruction "forty years" before it was destroyed. By the Talmudic editor's placement of these traditions and the correspondence of events said to happen both at Simeon's death and "forty years" before the temple was destroyed, it seems clear that these last events in Simeon's life should be dated to around AD 30.

3. *Midrash Rabbah*.³⁴ In the *Midrash Rabbah* of Leviticus, a similar tradition is associated with Simeon's death, though nothing explicit in the text would allow one to determine a date of the occurrence. The report of Simeon's

³⁰ Admittedly, the Talmud contains many legendary accounts and reports of bizarre supernatural activity.

³¹ A collection of rabbinic traditions, the Babylonian Talmud was likely completed AD 500–550. For further information, see Craig Evans, *Noncanonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation* 126–27.

³² Translation by Jacob Neusner, *The Talmud of Babylonia: An American Translation*, V. B.: *Yoma*, Chapters Three through Five 49. This story is also found in *y. Yoma* 5:2. 49–50.

³³ *b. Yoma* 4:1, English translation by Jacob Neusner, *The Talmud of Babylonia*, V. B.: *Yoma*, Chapters Three through Five 49. This story is also found in *y. Yoma* 5:2.

³⁴ The *Midrash Rabbah* (or "Long Midrash") of Leviticus was completed around AD 550. See Evans, *Noncanonical Writings* 133–34.

pre-death vision is given in response to rabbinic reflection on the Levitical instructions that allow only one man into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement—the high priest. Simeon was the high priest. Who, then, is this other person in Simeon’s story and how is he allowed into the Holy of Holies? The text in Midrash Rabbah Leviticus 21:12 reads:

In the year wherein Simeon the Righteous was to die he told his friends that he would die that year. Said they to him: “How do you know?” He answered them: “Every year an old man dressed in white and enveloped in white came in with me and went out with me, but this year he came in with me but did not go out with me.” R. Abbahu said: And who shall say that it was a man? Surely, it was the Holy One, blessed be He, in His own glory that came in with him and went out with him!³⁵

Thus, according to the Midrash Rabbah, a theophony accompanied Simeon the Righteous in his high priestly duties until the year of his death in AD 30. At that point, the mysterious divine figure went into the Holy of Holies but did not come out again. This story is apparently recorded by the editor of the Midrash Rabbah to indicate that there was some change in God’s attitude or actions towards the atonement of sin that began around the year AD 30.

4. *Tosefta*.³⁶ In *Tosefta Sotah* 13:6–8, we find a number of traditions about Simeon the Righteous. Much of the material found in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds and Midrash Rabbah is repeated here with some slight variation.³⁷ The traditions in the *Tosefta* say that after Simeon’s death the altar fire consumed wood more rapidly and that the food allowances for the priests were severely diminished. Also, the story of the mysterious figure on the Day of Atonement in the year of his death is repeated. No comments, however, are made about the western lamp, the crimson thread, the lot of the Lord, or the opening of temple doors.

One other story is reported which might help in the dating of Simeon’s death. In *Tosefta Sotah* 13:6, we read,

Simeon the Righteous heard a word from the House of the Holy of Holies: “Annulled is the decree which the enemy planned to bring against the sanctuary, and Gasqelges [Caligula] has been killed, and his decrees have been annulled.” And he heard [all this] in the Aramaic language.³⁸

Caligula served as Roman emperor from AD 37–41, so if Simeon the Righteous was still alive to hear of his death in AD 41, the events surrounding Simeon’s death are wrongly applied to a decade earlier in AD 30. The explicit dating of Simeon’s death to forty years before the temple was destroyed in other sources, however, leads me to offer a tentative harmonizing solution. A man

³⁵ *Lev. Rab.* 21:12, English translation by J. Israelstam, *Midrash Rabbah: Leviticus* (ed. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon; vol. 4; London: Soncino, 1951) 274–75. A similar tradition is found in *y. Yoma* 5:2.

³⁶ The *Tosefta*, which consists mostly of tannaic traditions, was likely completed AD 220–230. See Evans, *Noncanonical Writings* 122–25.

³⁷ From a source-critical perspective, the *Tosefta* material is chronologically prior to the traditions in the Talmud and Midrash Rabbah.

³⁸ English translation by Jacob Neusner, *The Tosefta: Third Division, Nashim [The Order of Women]* (New York: Ktav, 1979) 202.

named Simon Kantheras served as Jewish high priest beginning in the year AD 41. This would be the expected high priest named “Simon” to refer to Caligula’s death. On the other hand, we know that Simon, son of Kamithos, had served as high priest in the years AD 17–18. Though it is difficult to correlate all the dates, possibly this Simon, son of Kamithos is the Simon the Righteous whose death is associated with unusual signs in the temple around AD 30. Somehow, the traditions about the later Simon Kantheras become blended with traditions about the earlier Simon Kamithos. As we saw earlier in the paper, the Jewish traditions seem to place a man named “Simeon” or “Simon” the Righteous in at least five distinct historical periods. This confusion should not surprise us when we realize that between the years 200 BC and AD 70, at least five high priests were named Simon.

One real possibility is that the rabbinic traditions about Simeon the Righteous are so tangled that we are wasting our time in an effort to unravel them. How, in any case, could a high priest named Simeon be dated to the year AD 30, when it is universally recognized that Joseph Caiaphas served as high priest from AD 18–37? It should be remembered, however, that both NT and extra-biblical documents refer to more than one person as “high priest” at the same time.³⁹ According to BDAG, the plural ἀρχιερεῖς “is used in the NT and in Joseph[us] to denote members of the Sanhedrin who belonged to highpriestly families: ruling high priests, those who had been deposed, and adult male members of the most prominent priestly families.”⁴⁰ In this definition, it is important to note that the plural ἀρχιερεῖς includes both “ruling high priests” and “those who had been deposed.”⁴¹ Such a use is clearly seen in Luke 3:2, where both Annas and Caiaphas are referred to as holding the office of high priest. This usual situation of having both living and deposed high priests is largely the result of erratic appointing and deposing of high priests by political authorities.⁴² Simon Kamithos (or Camithos or Camithus) was deposed in AD 18 as high priest by the Roman prefect Valerius Gratus, who appointed Caiaphas in his place.⁴³ It is not clear, however, what role Simon may have continued to play after being deposed by the Roman prefect.

Emil Hirsch notes, “The deposed high priests seem to have retained the title, and to have continued to exercise certain functions; the ministration on the Day of Atonement, however, may have been reserved for the actual incumbent. This, however, is not clear.”⁴⁴ Hirsch goes on to mention a reference

³⁹ E.g. Matt 2:4; Mark 8:31; Luke 3:2; 9:22; John 7:32; Acts 4:23; Josephus, *Life* 1.193; *J.W.* 2.243; 4.151, 160, 238.

⁴⁰ BDAG 139.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² See Alexander Guttman, “The End of the Sacrificial Cult,” *HUCA* 38 (1967) 148.

⁴³ Josephus, *Ant.* 18.34–35. Valerius Gratus served as prefect AD 15–26.

⁴⁴ Emil Hirsch, “High Priest,” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (vol. 6; New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1904, 1910) 393. F. F. Bruce writes, “In Jewish religious law the sacral character of the high priest’s office and person (including the purificatory and matrimonial regulations governing him and the atoning virtue of his death) adhered to him after his deposition” (*New Testament History* [New York: Doubleday, 1969] 64, n. 37). See also Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions During the New Testament Period* (trans. F. H. and C. H. Cave; London: SCM, 1969) 157.

in the Babylonian Talmud that explicitly reserves two functions or privileges for the incumbent high priest on the Day of Atonement, though neither explicitly mentioned function is the actual ministrations for the nation's sins in the Holy of Holies.⁴⁵ It is possible, then, that Simon Kamithos could have continued to function in a significant role on the Day of Atonement until his death around AD 30.⁴⁶ At that point, with Caiaphas as the current politically-appointed high priest, it would not be unusual for him to defer to his father-in-law, Annas, who had been high priest from AD 6–15. Indeed, even though Annas was officially deposed as high priest in AD 15, it is clear from the NT that he continued to exercise many of the prerogatives of the high priest (Luke 3:2; John 18:13, 24; Acts 4:6). Our hypothesis as to how a certain high priest named Simon could be living and influential until the year AD 30 may indeed help elucidate the dual high priestly role we find described for Caiaphas and Annas in the NT.

5. *Wars of the Jews (Josephus)*. After rabbinic traditions, probably the next most important resource for researching Jewish reports of unusual phenomena in the temple is *Wars of the Jews* by the Jewish historian Josephus (AD 37–c. 100).

In book six, chapter five, Josephus speaks of many clear signs in the temple that foreshadowed its impending destruction. For at least some of these signs, Josephus admits they sound unreal to him, and he would not believe them if he were not relying on eyewitness testimony.⁴⁷

For purposes of confirming the NT records, it is significant that Josephus speaks of an earthquake that was felt in the temple precincts.⁴⁸ According to Josephus, this earthquake was accompanied by a loud sound—like the sound of many voices—which some present interpreted as saying, “Let us depart from here” (not a particularly auspicious statement).⁴⁹ Josephus dates this particular event to an unnamed Pentecost preceding the destruction of the temple.

One event that Josephus dates with precision is the intriguing story about a common farmer named Jesus (not Jesus of Nazareth). The man, Josephus says, went around for 7 years and 5 months prior to the temple's destruction repeatedly saying, “Woe, woe to Jerusalem.” Regardless of the formal opposition and persecution he faced, this man would not, in the translation of Whiston, “leave off his melancholy ditty.”⁵⁰ Finally, as the city was under siege and this prophet was walking along the city wall still repeating, “Woe, woe . . .,” a rock was hurled from a Roman catapult in his direction. Josephus

⁴⁵ *b. Hor.* 11b [3:3].

⁴⁶ I have been unable to find an explicit reference to the death of Simon Kamithos—unless the Talmudic references under discussion refer to him.

⁴⁷ *J.W.* 6.297.

⁴⁸ *J.W.* 6.299.

⁴⁹ *J.W.* 6.300.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* (William Whiston, trans., *The Works of Josephus: New Updated Edition* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987] 743.)

records that his last words just before he was hit were, "Woe, woe to myself also!"⁵¹

Josephus also identifies a phenomenon that corresponds to one mentioned in rabbinic sources. He reports that the massive eastern gate of the inner court of the temple was seen to open on its own about the sixth hour of the night.⁵² Again, we note that this event is not too far removed conceptually from the idea of a temple doorway being opened through the tearing of a curtain. Another event Josephus reports, which will also be mentioned in a source below, is the shining of a bright, unexplainable light from the altar of the temple in the middle of the night. Josephus says that the illumination appeared for half an hour and portended the events that followed "immediately after."⁵³

Other unusual occurrences that Josephus identifies as portents of the temple's destruction include:

- (a) a star resembling a sword which stood over Jerusalem for a year,⁵⁴
- (b) a comet,⁵⁵
- (c) a heifer brought for sacrifice that gave birth in the temple precincts before it could be slaughtered;⁵⁶
- (d) the images of chariots and troops of soldiers seen in the clouds above Jerusalem.⁵⁷

While Josephus does report a phenomenon mentioned explicitly in the Gospels (i.e. an earthquake), his dating of that event to Pentecost impinges significantly upon any effort to correlate it with our Gospels. In regard to other events reported above (excluding the prophetic farmer Jesus), it appears that Josephus believes that these events occurred not long before the Jewish rebellion. At the same time, Josephus seems to be reporting a litany of traditions he has received without carefully differentiating their time frame.⁵⁸ Most historians would see the explicitness of some of these portents (e.g.

⁵¹ *J.W.* 6.309. See Markus N. A. Brockmuehl's discussion of this text in "Why Did Jesus Predict the Destruction of the Temple?" *Crux* 25 (1989) 12–13.

⁵² *J.W.* 6.293.

⁵³ *J.W.* 6.291.

⁵⁴ *J.W.* 6.289.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* Josephus's reference to a comet may simply be a further explanation of the previously mentioned star.

⁵⁶ *J.W.* 6.292.

⁵⁷ *J.W.* 6.298–99.

⁵⁸ The Roman historian Tacitus reports similar portents that preceded the temple's destruction, though in a different order: "Prodigies had indeed occurred, but to avert them either by victims or by vows is held unlawful by a people [the Jews] which, though prone to superstition, is opposed to all propitiatory rites. Contending hosts were seen meeting in the skies, arms flashed, and suddenly the temple was illuminated with fire from the clouds. Of a sudden, the doors of the shrine opened and a superhuman voice cried: 'The gods are departing': 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

soldiers and troops in the clouds) as relatively strong evidence that post-AD 70 knowledge is being read back into earlier times.

6. *The Lives of the Prophets*. *The Lives of the Prophets* is a document in the OT Pseudepigrapha dated to roughly the first quarter of the first century AD.⁵⁹ In chapter twelve of this document we find a prophecy falsely written under the name of Habbakuk, which is presented as addressing a post-Babylonian exile situation. The text reads:

He gave a portent to those in Judea, that they would see a light in the Temple and so perceive the glory of the Temple. And concerning the end of the Temple he predicted, "By a western nation it will happen." "At that time," he said, "the curtain of the *Dabeir* [that is, the temple curtain separating the Holy from the Holy of Holies] will be torn into pieces, and the capitals of the two pillars will be taken away, and no one will know where they are; and they will be carried away by angels into the wilderness, where the tent of witness was set up in the beginning. And by means of them the Lord will be recognized at the end, for they will illuminate those who are being pursued by the serpent in darkness as from the beginning."⁶⁰

If this passage is correctly dated to roughly the first quarter of the first century, a number of the details are noteworthy. Most significantly, we find an explicit mention of the curtain in the temple being torn.⁶¹ This tearing is presented as either a portent of the temple's impending destruction or a symbolic act representing God's departure. The lack of explicit details as to what actually happened to the temple in AD 70 as well as predictions that were not fulfilled at that time (i.e. the carrying of capitals from the temple into the wilderness by angels) provides further evidence that this passage was written prior to the temple's destruction.

Where did the first-century Jewish author of *The Lives of the Prophets* get the idea that the temple curtain would be torn? At this point, one can only conjecture, but the actual historical rending of the curtain may have provided a basis for his reflection. If so, the passage would obviously have to be dated after AD 30.

way of human ambition, interpreted these great destinies in their own favour, and could not be turned to the truth even by adversity" (*Histories* 5.13; LCL 249, pp. 196–99; English translation by Clifford H. Moore). Scholars debate whether Tacitus was dependent on Josephus or they were both dependent on some common source (Montefiore, "Josephus and the New Testament" 151–52).

⁵⁹ In Charlesworth's *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, the translator of *The Lives of the Prophets*, D. R. A. Hare, writes, "Although demonstration is impossible, it would appear that the most probable date [for 'The Lives of the Prophets'] is the first quarter of the first century A.D." (*OTP* 2.381).

⁶⁰ *Liv. Proph. (Habakkuk)* 12:10–13. English translation by D. R. A. Hare (*OTP* 2.393–94).

⁶¹ The Babylonian Talmud speaks of Titus cutting the inner veil of the temple with his sword upon the conquest of Jerusalem in the year AD 70. According to the tradition, blood spurted out of the curtain when it was cut (*b. Git.* 56b [5:6]). The Babylonian Talmud also reports that Titus made a basket out of the temple veil to carry the utensils of the sanctuary back to Rome (*b. Git.* 56b [5:6]). *Sifre on Deuteronomy* says that Titus cut *two* veils at the entrance to the Holy of Holies (*Sifre Deut.* §328). See n. 6 above.

Another detail in the portent should be noted. The author states, "They would see a light in the Temple and so perceive the glory of the Temple."⁶² This is a vague prediction, which could have originally been intended as either a metaphorical or natural description. Josephus's account, however, of an unexplainable light shining from the altar of the temple prior to its destruction (see above) should lead us to not discount immediately a historical reality or at least a pre-AD 70 tradition behind this passage.

Indeed, the editor and translator of the *Lives of the Prophets* in Charlesworth's *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, D. R. A. Hare, comments about the passage under discussion:

The prediction of 12:11 that the Temple will be destroyed by a Western nation was probably understood as referring to the Romans, but nothing requires that it be taken as a prophecy after the fact; the accompanying statements have the ring of unfulfilled predictions.⁶³

One basis that Hare and others have for claiming that this text is not a later Christian interpolation are the many *clear* examples of Christian interpolation that can be found in the Pseudepigrapha.⁶⁴ The lack of clear Christian content indicates either an incompetent interpolator or the lack of interpolation, the latter seeming more likely.

For the purpose of comparison, I will briefly supply a widely recognized example of later Christian editing from the *Testament of Benjamin* 9:2–3.

But in your allotted place will be the temple of God, and the latter temple will exceed the former in glory. The twelve tribes shall be gathered there and all the nations, until such time as the Most High shall send forth his salvation through the ministration of the unique prophet. He shall enter the first temple, and there the Lord will be abused and will be raised up on wood. And the temple curtain will be torn, and the spirit of God will move on to all the nations as a fire is poured out. And he shall ascend from Hades and shall pass on from earth to heaven. I understand how humble he will be on earth, and how splendid in heaven.⁶⁵

Some well-meaning Christian scribe has doctored this text nicely. Nevertheless, the purpose of this paper is not to survey later Christian additions to originally Jewish texts, but actual early Jewish traditions about phenomena in the temple independent of canonical Christian sources. There are other Jewish sources that could be mentioned in this article, but I have chosen a few of the more relevant ones for this exploratory article.

⁶² *Liv. Proph. (Habakkuk)* 12:10.

⁶³ *OTP* 2.381, n. 11.

⁶⁴ See e.g. M. de Jonge, "Christian Influence in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *NovT* 4 (1960) 182–235; *idem*, "Two Interesting Interpretations of the Rending of the Temple-Veil in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *Bijdragen* 46 (1985) 350–62. Gösta Lindeskog notes the obvious Christian interpolations in *Testament of Levi* 10 and *Testament of Benjamin* 9 ("The Veil of the Temple" 135).

⁶⁵ English translation by H. C. Kee (*OTP* 1.827).

IV. CONCLUSION

We began this study by noting the description of supernatural phenomena at the death of Jesus as reported in the canonical Gospels. We went on to survey six early non-biblical Jewish sources that also report unusual phenomena in the temple prior to its destruction. Some of these traditions (e.g. an earthquake, the temple curtain tearing, and temple doors opening on their own) seem to correlate closely with the Gospel traditions. One of the most significant details in some of the sources is the explicit dating of these odd events to “forty years before the temple was destroyed”—the time of Jesus’ crucifixion.

Our conclusions must remain tentative about the historical reality of the events reported in the non-biblical Jewish sources. We must be circumspect as well in attempts to correlate them with historical accounts in the Gospels. Yet, even with these caveats, it appears to me that there is enough relevant data to warrant considering this information in historical assessments of the Gospel narratives. It is standard in commentaries on the Gospels to include Talmudic references to reports that Jesus was a sorcerer or illegitimate child. It seems to me that some of the references we have examined in this paper would at least warrant similar consideration for possible historical confirmation of unusual phenomena in the temple at the time of Jesus’ death.