Just a Thought

Nothing At All

"There was nothing at all therein." — Josephus, The Jewish War, 5.219

For centuries, behind the veil of Israel's Temple, there was nothing at all.

When Solomon's Temple was destroyed by Babylon in 586 BC, the Ark of the Covenant disappeared from biblical history. When the Temple was rebuilt under Zerubbabel, the Holy of Holies was restored, but the Ark and mercy seat were gone. Scripture never records the glory of the LORD filling that Temple as it had filled the tabernacle and Solomon's Temple.

Still, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. The sacrifices continued. The blood was carried behind the veil into the place where the Ark had once stood. The ceremony continued year after year, but the room remained without the central object around which that ceremony had originally been instituted.

Then came centuries of prophetic silence.

Yet while God was silent, religion was not. Men continued teaching, interpreting, debating, organizing, and developing traditions. Religious parties arose. Rules multiplied. Hellenistic culture exerted its influence. Eventually Herod transformed the Temple into a magnificent structure. He could enlarge it and beautify it, but he could not restore the Ark or summon the glory of God.

Then Jesus entered the Temple.

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory." John 1:14

For centuries the Temple had known neither the Ark nor the visible glory that had filled Solomon's Temple. Then God in his glory walked through its courts. Haggai had promised, *"The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former"* (Haggai 2:9). Solomon's Temple had possessed the Ark and the glory cloud. The Second Temple received something greater.

Christ came.

But when the glory of God entered the Temple, he found another kind of emptiness.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" Matthew 23:27

Jesus described religious leaders who carefully cleaned the outside while corruption remained within. They were like whitewashed tombs, outwardly beautiful but inwardly filled with death. They tithed meticulously while neglecting *"the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness"* (Matthew 23:23).

The Temple was magnificent. Religion was everywhere. But outward appearance could conceal inward emptiness.

That is what makes Christ's warning so uncomfortable. The Pharisees were not irreligious men. Religion occupied their lives. They knew Scripture, prayed, fasted, gave, worshiped, and defended what they believed. Their danger was not that they possessed too little religion. They possessed enough religion to make emptiness look like fullness.

And that danger did not die with them.

A person can attend church, sing hymns, read Scripture, pray, give, serve, defend sound doctrine, and speak fluently about God while the heart remains far from him. Others may see an impressive exterior. Christ sees what is within.

What would Christ find if he looked behind the veil?

The answer to Israel's empty room was never another golden Ark. Ark, mercy seat, priesthood, blood, and sacrifice pointed beyond themselves to Christ.

When Christ offered the true sacrifice, *"the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom"* (Matthew 27:51). The shadows had served their purpose.

Years later John was permitted to look into another Temple:

"Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple." Revelation 11:19

Josephus looked behind the earthly veil and reported, *"There was nothing at all therein."*

John looked into heaven.

The Ark was there.

Christ was there.

Nothing was missing.

Just a thought.

John L. Wheeler

© 2026 John L. Wheeler / Joshua House Books, LLC. All rights reserved.