FROM CHAPTER 3

VEIL SPECIFICATIONS IN THE PRIESTLY SOURCE MATERIAL

Theological Functions of the Veil

The Veil as a Garment of God

Yahweh's tabernacle in the desert was a habitation of the divine. The veil that stood before the most holy place, then, was something of a sacred garment shielding his glorious presence from the covenant people, not unlike the veil Moses wore over his face after speaking with God on Mount Sinai to shield the Israelites from the radiance exuding from his countenance (Exod 34:29–35; cf. 2 Cor 3:13).[1] This "garment of God" imagery finds copious support in biblical, intertestamental, rabbinic, and contemporaneous literature from the ANE. For example, in classic poetic fashion, the psalmist writes:

a LORD my God, You are very great;
a' You are clothed with splendor and majesty,
b Covering Yourself with light as with a cloak,
b' Stretching out heaven like a tent curtain (Ps 104:1b–2).

Not only is Yahweh said to be figuratively clothed in light, but his luminous "cloak [שַׂלְמָה]" in the **b** line stands synthetically parallel to the "tent curtain [יְרִיעָה]" in the **b'** line.[2] Additionally, God is said to be metaphorically robed, clothed, or wearing garments several more times in the HB (Ps 93:1; Isa 6:1; 59:17; Ezek 16:8; and Dan 7:9). The prophet Isaiah famously "saw the Lord sitting on a throne,

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[1] The Hebrew word for the "veil" that Moses wore in Exodus 34:33–35 is מַסְוֶה, translated in the LXX as κάλυμμα, the same word used multiple times throughout the Pentateuch for certain screens, coverings, and curtains in the tabernacle (e.g., Exod 27:16; 40:5; Num 3:25; 4:10, 14).

[2] Cf. Isaiah 40:22, where God "stretches out the heavens like a curtain/And spreads them out like a tent to live in." Smith comments, "God's power is celebrated and his glory proclaimed by remembering the tradition that God stretched out the vast heavens like a fine cloth (42:5; 44:24; 45:12; 51:13 'the canopy of the heavens'), just like a person might stretch netting over the poles of a tent." See Gary Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, NAC 15B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 117.

lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe [וְשׁוּלָיו = hem, skirt, trailing train of a majestic robe] filling the temple" (Isa 6:1). This visionary scene of God enrobed in sumptuous, superfluous cloth may have been reminiscent of the myriad curtains comprising the tabernacle itself.[3]

The "garment of God" imagery likewise carries into the intertestamental period. In 1 Enoch, the eponymous character describes a vision of the divine throne, stating, "The Great Glory was sitting upon it. As for his gown, which was shining more brightly than the sun, it was whiter than any snow" (1 En. 14.20).[4] On another occasion, Enoch's spirit ascends to the heavens where he sees seraphim, cherubim, ophanim, and innumerable angels around God's throne, along with Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, Phanuel, and others. He reports, "With them is the Antecedent of Time: His head is white and pure like wool and his garment is indescribable" (1 En. 71.10).[5] In yet another heavenly scene, the LORD commands the angel Michael to "extract Enoch from his earthly clothing" and "put him into the clothes of my glory," with Enoch describing his new garments as being like the "rays of the glittering sun" such that "there was no observable difference" between him and God's "glorious ones" (2 En. 22.8–10).[6] In 3 Enoch, R. Ishmael tells how he journeyed to heaven, saw God's throne, and received revelations from the archangel Meṭaṭron. He writes, "When the Holy One, blessed be he, sits in judgment on the throne of judgment, his garment is white like

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[3] The plural construct form of the noun שׁוּל in Isaiah 6:1 (וְשׁוּלָיו) is usually understood to mean the flowing part of a majestic robe that drags on the ground behind the royal person wearing it. Billington proposes that the "*šûlê* are in fact multiple hems, the result of creating a garment by wrapping a length of cloth around and around the body, so that one selvedge of the cloth is seen repeatedly at the lower edge of the garment." Such styling is archaeologically attested by a 15th century BC bronze plaque of a Canaanite dignitary from Hazor showing "a length of cloth that has been wrapped four times around the man's body, creating multiple hems from the lengthwise selvedge of the cloth," and the 9th century Kilamuwa Stele, which portrays King Kilamuwa of Sam'al (southern Anatolia/far northern Levant) wearing "a wrapped garment with multiple hems." See Selena Billington, "Glorious Adornment: The Social Function of Cloth and Clothing in Israel's Tabernacle" (PhD diss., University of Denver, Iliff School of Theology, 2014), 222–25. Either way, Isaiah sees the *garmented* God of Israel in his temple.

[4] Trans. E. Isaac, *OTP* 1:21.

[5] Ibid., 50.

[6] Trans. F. I. Andersen, *OTP* 1:138.

snow, the hair of his head is as pure wool, his whole robe shines like a dazzling light and he is covered all over with righteousness as with a coat of mail" (3 En. 28.7).[7] Finally, Bonner notes that some variants for T. Levi 10:3, which refers to "the curtain of the temple," use ἔνδυμα ("garment") instead of καταπέτασμα ("veil," "curtain," or "screen"). Since ἔνδυμα is not used as a translation for the Hebrew words for veil, he suggests that "the branches of the text which use ἔνδυμα were influenced by the notion that the veil was the 'garment' of the temple or its indwelling angel."[8]

In later rabbinic literature, God is said to be wearing purple garments that he tears in lament over the sin of his people and the destruction of Jerusalem (Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 15.3; Lam. Rab. 1.1; 2.21; and Lev. Rab. 6.5). For example, Lamentations Rabbah 1.1 (ca. AD 450) states:

> Rav Naḥman said that Shmuel said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi: The Holy One, blessed be He, summoned the ministering angels and said to them… "A flesh and blood king, what does he typically do?" "He rends his purple garments." "That is what I will do," as it is stated: "The Lord accomplished what He devised; He implemented His statement" [Lam 2:17]."[9]

The final section of appendix 6 ("Early References to the Tearing of Garments as a Gesture of Grief or Indignation") contains additional rabbinic passages where God is said to have torn his robes.

The "garment of God" imagery is also well attested in the polytheistic religions of the ancient Near East, where statues of deities were literally enrobed in luxurious textiles meticulously crafted to convey their lofty status through royal adornment. For example, in a hymn to the goddess Ishtar from the 17th century BC, a Babylonian poet writes:

> Ishtar is clothed with pleasure and love.
> She is laden with vitality, charm, and voluptuousness.
> In lips she is sweet; life is in her mouth.
> At her appearance rejoicing becomes full.

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[7] Trans. P. Alexander, *OTP* 1:283.

[8] Campbell Bonner, "Two Problems in Melito's Homily on the Passion," *HTR* 31 (1938), 185.

[9] Joshua Schreier, trans., *The Sefaria Midrash Rabbah*, ed. Michael Siev and Yaacov Francus (New York: Sefaria, 2022), Lam. Rab. 1.1.

She is glorious; veils are thrown over her head.
Her figure is beautiful; her eyes are brilliant.[10]

Moreover, when Ishtar passes through the seven gates of the underworld, she is stripped of seven sets of garments and jewelry, all of which symbolize her divine power and authority:

He [the gatekeeper] let her [Ishtar] in through the seventh door, but stripped off (and) took away the proud garment of her body.
"Gatekeeper, why have you taken away the proud garment of my body?"
"Go in, my lady. Such are the rites of the Mistress of Earth."
As soon as Ishtar went down to Kurnugi,
Ereshkigal looked at her and trembled before her.[11]

In his seminal work, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, Oppenheim details the ***lubuštu*** (dressing) ceremony, a central ritual where Mesopotamian cult statues were clothed in elaborate garments to maintain their status as living embodiments of the divine.[12] The practice continued over the centuries throughout the region. In his extensive work on the textile industry and divine iconography in Neo-Babylonian Mesopotamia (ca. 7th–6th centuries BC), Zawadzki found that garments used for deities and elite personnel were distinct from commoners' clothing. While ordinary people wore simple tunics like the *túg-kurra*, divine garments were complex and often made from luxury materials such as high-quality linen, wool, and eventually *kidinnu* (cotton). The clothing of the gods was not merely functional but central to their identity as divine.[13]

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[10] "Hymn to Ishtar," trans. Ferris J. Stephens, *ANET*, 383.

[11] "The Descent of Ishtar to the Underworld," trans. Stephanie Dalley, *COS* 1.108:382.

[12] See A. Leo Oppenheim, "The Care and Feeding of the Gods," pages 183–98 in *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, rev. ed., completed by Erica Reiner (1964; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977). See also Edward M. Curtis, "Idol, Idolatry," *AYBD*, 376–81, Logos Bible Software edition; Dominic Rudman, "When Gods Go Hungry," *BRev* 18 (2002): 37–39; H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon: A Sketch of the Ancient Civilization of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1962), 351–54; and F. A. M. Wiggermann, "Theologies, Priests, and Worship in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *CANE*, ed. Jack M. Sasson (1995; repr. in 2 vols., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 2:1857–70.

[13] See Stefan Zawadzki, *Garments of the Gods: Studies on the Textile Industry and the Pantheon of Sippar according to the Texts from the Ebabbar Archive*, 2 vols., OBO 218 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

Similar practices were also common in Egypt. Erman describes the daily temple ritual where priests, acting as the Pharaoh's representatives, awakened and cared for the cult statues (e.g., Amon, Isis, Ptah, etc.), which included the removal of old rouge and garments, and the application of fresh rouge and white linen robes, called Nems, saying:

> Let thy seat be adorned and thy robes exalted; the princes of the goddess of heaven come to thee, they descend from heaven and from the horizon that they may hear praise before thee…. Come white dress! come white dress! come white eye of Horus, which proceeds from the town of Nechebt. The gods dress themselves with thee in thy name Dress, and the gods adorn themselves with thee in thy name *Adornment*.[14]

The priest then presents the deity with his or her insignia and other adornments, including the scepter, staff, whip, bracelets, anklets, and two feathers worn on the head, all while making sure the inner sanctum is properly cleansed and perfumed, and the sacred uraeus (cobra on the deity's brow) is properly incensed.[15] As Sauneron notes concerning Egyptian deities, "From sunrise to sunset, they were bathed, clothed, perfumed, fed, distracted by song and music, and put in good humor, so that they might perform their divine task, which was to ensure the smooth functioning of the universe."[16]

Dressed deities, then, were common fare in the ancient world. Yahweh, of course, had no image or likeness to adorn, only an inner sanctum to veil, along with a spiritual presence that could be described only metaphorically as wearing garments. That said, it is interesting to note that various parts of the tabernacle itself are described using words that can sometimes convey anatomical meanings as well as their architectural or locational senses. For example, the top of the tabernacle frame is called a "head" (רֹאשׁ, Exod 26:24), the entrance is termed a "face" (פָּנֶה, Exod

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[14] Adolf Erman, *Life in Ancient Egypt*, trans. Helen Mary Tirard (London: Macmillan, 1894), 274.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Serge Sauneron, *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, new ed., trans. David Lorton (1957; repr., Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 75.

26:9), the side is labeled a "rib" (צֶלַע, Exod 26:26), the courtyard flank is named a "shoulder" (כָּתֵף, Exod 27:14), and the two tenons that connect each frame are styled as "arms," "hands," or "fingers" (יָדוֹת, Exod 26:17). NASB 2020 rightly provides a marginal reading of "at its head" for the Hebrew expression עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ in Exodus 26:24. It also footnotes a literal reading of "toward the front of the face of the tent" for the expression אֶל־מוּל פְּנֵי הָאֹהֶל in Exodus 26:9, and a literal reading of "shoulder" for the word לַכָּתֵף in Exodus 27:14. (See table 8 for a list of possible anatomical vocabulary in Exodus for various parts of the tabernacle.)

TABLE 8. POSSIBLE ANATOMICAL VOCABULARY IN EXODUS FOR VARIOUS PARTS OF THE TABERNACLE

Exodus Text	NASB 2020 Translation	Manuscript Form	Lexical Form	Anthropomorphic Rendering
26:24	"top"	עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ	רֹאשׁ	"head"
26:9	"front"	פְּנֵי	פָּנֶה	"face"
26:26	"side"	צֶלַע	צֶלַע	"rib"
27:14	"side"	לַכָּתֵף	כָּתֵף	"shoulder"
26:17	"tenons"	יָדוֹת	יָד	"arm" / "hand" / "finger"
26:12	"back"	אֲחֹרֵי	אָחוֹר	"back"

Note: NASB 2020 provides a marginal reading of "at its head" for the expression עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ in Exodus 26:24. It also notes a literal reading of "toward the front of the face of the tent" for the expression אֶל־מוּל פְּנֵי הָאֹהֶל in Exodus 26:9, and a literal reading of "shoulder" for the word לַכָּתֵף in Exodus 27:14. The texts cited above are first occurrences only. Most of these terms appear passim in P.

One may dismiss these anatomical readings as mere literary happenstance or reject them outright based on how semantic domains typically work. After all, English writers can refer to the "face" or "back" of a building without connoting any sense of personhood or corporeality to the structure in question. On the other hand, such writers would seldom perpetuate the imagery by speaking further of the same building's "head," "ribs," "shoulders," "arms," "fingers," and/or "hands" without some kind of intentionality. An emerging pattern warrants consideration. While not particularly extensive, such language nevertheless persists through Solomon's day (e.g., 1 Kgs 6:3,

5, 8; 7:39), all the way to the time of Josephus, who notes that the entrance to Herod's temple "had what may be styled shoulders [ώμοι] on each side," because its "front [πρόσωπον = face]" was 40 cubits wider than the structure behind it—20 cubits on each side (*J.W.* 5.207.18). Additionally, the Babylonian Talmud contains an account where the Jewish sage Baba ben Buta says to King Herod, who had inquired about how to remedy his previous violent behavior toward the Jews, that the king should "go and occupy himself with the eye of the world [בְּעֵינוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם]," meaning the temple (b. B. Bat. 4a.3).[17] Most notably, the body-temple connection becomes a prominent theme in the NT, one that even Jesus himself uses on at least one occasion (John 2:20–21; see additional references below). Perhaps the seeds for such a connection were planted in the soil of the OT all along.

One is justified in asking, then, "Whose body parts are these?" The question may not elicit a definitive answer, but it remains tantalizing nonetheless in light of copious anthropomorphisms for God throughout the HB (e.g., Exod 7:5l Lev 20:6; Num 6:25; Deut 4:34, 5:15, 11:12; 2 Kgs 19:16; 2 Chron 16:9; Neh 1:6; Ps 34:15, 89:10; Isa 23:11, 66:1; etc.). Indeed, Palmer finds that the visual correspondences between the high priest's garments and the tabernacle's styling and fabrication scheme are "furthered by the use of *anthropomorphic terminology* in reference to the tent shrine."[18] Her contention is that when the high priest was arrayed in his full regalia, he was a living embodiment of the tabernacle itself, which is described using anatomical terms. She argues that his dress "performatively fashions a bond between the [two] worlds the high priest represents, making

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[17] The passage seeks to resolve how the same king who had behaved so viciously toward the Jews nevertheless went on to spearhead, fund, and complete the rebuilding and beautification of the temple in Jerusalem.

[18] Christine Palmer, "Israelite High Priestly Apparel: Embodying an Identity between Human and Divine," pages 117–28 in *Fashioned Selves: Dress and Identity in Antiquity*, ed. Megan Cifarelli (Oxford: Oxbow, 2019), 126, n. 3. Emphasis mine.

him an access point to the divine and his dressed body a meeting place of heaven and earth."[19]

The alternative anatomical language for Yahweh's tabernacle and subsequent temples may yield several applications, both for the argument of this dissertation and for certain theological considerations beyond it. Specifically, an anthropomorphic reading of the tabernacle texts may: (1) support the interpretation that the torn veil in the temple can be understood, at least in part, as God's expression of lament at the death of his Son (see chapter 6, along with appendix 6: "Early References to the Tearing of Garments as a Gesture of Grief or Indignation," which includes the four rabbinic references cited above where God tears his own garment); (2) underlie the perplexing metaphor in Hebrews 10:20 that the "curtain [καταπετάσματος]" of the most holy place is Jesus's "body [σαρκὸς]" (see chapter 7, where it is noted that the tabernacle veil was basically the color of bruises and blood, and is called by Philo "the mediating Logos"); and (3) contribute to Paul's understanding that Christian believers—specifically their *bodies*—are temples of the Holy Spirit, both individually and corporately (1 Cor 6:19; cf. 1 Cor 3:9, 16–17; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:19–22; 1 Pet 2:5; cf. John 1:14; 2:20–21).[20] It is possible, then, that the tabernacle—as a central semiotic for Israel's spiritual edification and theological understanding—was never only about sacred

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[19] Ibid., 117. In light of the Christian story, then, one might retroactively regard Israel's high priest as a prototypical Incarnation, and the holy of holies as a prototypical heaven from which Jesus came, a possibility to be explored in chapter 5.

[20] Buckwalter writes, "This temple language would have held great relevance and fascination to readers living in Western Asia Minor [where the massive and resplendent Temple of Artemis famously stood in Paul's day until it was destroyed by the Goths in A.D. 262]…. In the literary center of chapters 1–3 of Ephesians, Paul describes a temple where the Living God dwells (2:19–22). Its foundation is the prophetic work of God that led up to Christ and the apostolic preaching about the gospel of what God has done in Christ. Its cornerstone is the redemptive work of Christ Jesus himself. This raised structure is made of Jewish and Gentile believers in which God dwells in its inner chamber. This temple displays a magnificence far exceeding a stone structure made with human hands, no matter how glorious its radiance in the noon-day sun. This structure marauders cannot plunder, and floods, fire and earthquakes cannot destroy…. And it is always increasing in its brilliance with believers being continually added to it. It is not an institution, but the confessing Body of believers that aligns itself with its Head, Jesus Christ." See H. Douglas Buckwalter, "The Temple as the Living Body of Christ in Ephesians," *EJ* 27 (2009): 48.

architecture, but sacred anatomy. It was not merely holy structure, but holy story. It was not just divine edifice, but divine embodiment.

As Israel's covenant history unfolds, the פָּרֹכֶת hanging in the desert tabernacle is replicated in the nation's subsequent temples in Jerusalem. If that veil rightly can be understood as a metaphorical "garment of God," then its tearing in Herod's temple at the precise moment of Jesus's death on the cross may have been God's way of telegraphing his deep lament over the bloody, violent, and unjust execution of his Son. It also may have been his way of communicating divine indignation toward those who did it, not to mention the tearing of the kingdom from them (cf. 1 Sam 15:27–28; Matt 21:43).