

Walking Through the Veil V: Resting In the Mystery

And the Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." And the Lord said, "I will cause all of my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." Then the Lord said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen." – Exodus 33 (17-23 printed)

The Disappearing Deity

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt." – Exodus 32:7

While Moses was on the mountain with God resting in His glory and receiving both commandments and patterns that would become the tabernacle, the people got impatient. They were ok with ascribing their departure from Egypt to God, but the disappearance of Moses caused them to begin to doubt where, or even who this God was. Israel was used to the Egyptian culture where gods were everywhere, so if one disappeared, there was always another to take its place. The command of the god, then, was only as valid and relevant as the tangible presence of the god itself.

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him." – Exodus 32:1

They had been given instruction to wait while Moses went into the cloud, but the efficacy of that command waned the longer Moses remained away. The people were ready to move, to get to the place they felt they were supposed to be, and the *barrier*, or restriction to wait was not something they were willing to continue doing. They knew *where* Moses went, but **they did not know what was happening on the other side of the cloud.**

Supporting Players

Inside the tabernacle, everything had a place. Typically when we look at the elements of anything, including the tabernacle, we focus on the main players: the captain of the team, the MVP, the "big shiny object", the featured star or principal

performer. The supporting players however play an important role: not only when they get their 15 minutes of fame, but also as they relate to the whole.

Set up the tabernacle according to the plan shown you on the mountain. Make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen, with cherubim worked into it by a skilled craftsman. Hang it with gold hooks on four posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold and standing on four silver bases. Hang the curtain from the clasps and place the Ark of the Testimony behind the curtain. The curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. – Exodus 26:30-33

The curtain, or veil, was such a supporting player. It would get no love or notoriety until the time Jesus came, when at his crucifixion it was torn in two. Its place in the tabernacle, and even the way in which it was constructed showed that in God there is no such thing as a supporting player – that everything he does has a specific purpose in bringing us back to himself and showing his character, his glory and his love.

Job of the Curtain

When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. – Hebrews 9:6-7

The Veil, or curtain's job was simple: divide *this* from *that*. Within the confined space of the tabernacle, from Courtyard to Holy Place to Holy of Holies, there were certain places that were prescribed for only certain people. While all the congregation of Israel could gather in the courtyard for the purpose of sacrifice, only the priests were allowed in the Holy Place. Similarly, only the High Priest was allowed behind the Veil.

*They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! **The whole community is holy, every one of them**, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" ... Moses also said to Korah, "Now listen, you Levites! Isn't it enough for you that the God of Israel **has separated you from the rest of the Israelite community** and brought you near himself to do the work at the Lord's tabernacle and to stand before the community and minister to them?" – Numbers 16:3, 8-9*

Separation can be hard to accept. Korah was able to accept the separation that he operated in when it came to the rest of Israel, but felt that he deserved or desired what Aaron and Moses *had*, "had" being the operative word. For God, the place given to Aaron and Moses was not a badge of honor, but a place of communion where God came to do business on behalf of the entire community of Israel. Korah saw it differently, and therefore, in his attitude tried to force his way into the presence of

God. Korah didn't fully understand what was really happening on the other side of the curtain.

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.
Deuteronomy 29:29

Korah tried to force the hand for the things God wanted to keep secret, and that resulted in his death. When we fail to accept God's purpose in an action he is doing, it also results in us experiencing a kind of death – we fail to experience the full life that God has for us.

Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." – Exodus 33:18

Moses' request is a very interesting one. Interesting because he had just spent 40 days in the glory of God, and had experienced the glory of God on a regular basis – when the glory of the Lord would descend upon the Tent of Meeting, Moses would go meet with God. Furthermore, Moses was having a direct "face to face" conversation with the Lord. For whatever reason, this was not enough for Moses, so he made a request to fulfill something in himself. Philip made a similar request to Jesus:

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." – John 14:8

While both requests had merit and came from a sincere heart, they were not in line with what God was doing. God was at work *behind the veil*, and fulfilling those requests would have ended in death or separation from God's purpose.

And the Lord said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, The LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." – Exodus 33:19-20

God was keeping certain things secret. The time was not yet for the revealing of His face. The purpose of the veil then was very important: **to keep the things God wanted as secret.**

This is the work of the Kohathites in the Tent of Meeting: the care of the most holy things. When the camp is to move, Aaron and his sons are to go in and take down the shielding curtain and cover the ark of the Testimony with it. – Numbers 4:4-5

When the ark was in the tabernacle it was fully hidden from everyone but the high priest, but from time to time Israel had to move, which meant disassembling the tabernacle. It was important to God for the ark of the Testimony to remain hidden, so the veil was used to keep the ark out of the site of Israel and of the surrounding communities.

The Making of the Veil

Make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yard and finely twisted linen, with cherubim worked into it by a skilled craftsman. – Exodus 26:31

God's design of the veil was very similar to the door to the tabernacle itself, the actual Tent of Meeting, and the door to the courtyard. All were made from 4 different colored fabrics: blue, purple, scarlet and linen. The Veil had one other characteristic the others did not: cherubim were woven into the actual fabric. Josephus, an historian during the early days of the church described the veil in Solomon's temple this way:

before these doors there was a veil of equal largeness with the doors. It was a Babylonian curtain, embroidered with blue, and fine linen, and scarlet, and purple, and of a contexture that was truly wonderful. Nor was this mixture of colors without its mystical interpretation, but was a kind of image of the universe; for by the scarlet there seemed to be enigmatically signified fire, by the fine flax the earth, by the blue the air, and by the purple the sea; two of them having their colors the foundation of this resemblance; but the fine flax and the purple have their own origin for that foundation, the earth producing the one, and the sea the other. This curtain had also embroidered upon it all that was mystical in the heavens, excepting that of the [twelve] signs, representing living creatures. (Wars 5.5.4)

To Josephus, the veil was much more than just a shield, but it was a picture of creation itself. Not only the physical creation, but of all creation, terrestrial and celestial. Scripture gives us another description of what the veil represents:

*Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us **through the curtain, that is, his body**, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. – Hebrews 10:19-22*

If the veil was Jesus' body, then for Moses, Aaron and the Israelites, they had to wait to see what God was really doing. Not only did they have to wait for it, they had to rest in the place that God had them in, knowing that God was still working, even though they couldn't see it. God kept his purposes hidden, reserved until the right time

*But only the High Priest entered the inner room and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. **The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed** as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. – Hebrews 9:7-8*

On the one hand, God was showing his plan to Israel; on the other, he would not reveal it until the right time. The veil was both a declaration and a sign of God's plan

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for Israel and the world, and a shield for the most intimate part of that sign: the part that God would play alone.