

Deuteronomy 4:36

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee: and upon earth he shewed thee his great fire; and thou heardest his words out of the midst of the fire.

Analysis

Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee: and upon earth he shewed thee his great fire...

Moses describes divine revelation through complementary modes: min hashamayim (מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם, 'from heaven') Israel heard God's voice; al ha'arets (עַל הָאָרֶץ, 'upon earth') they saw His fire. Heaven and earth unite in theophany—the transcendent God condescends to earthly encounter. The verb leyassrekha (לִيְסַרְךָ, 'to instruct/discipline you') uses yasar, which includes correction and training, not mere information transfer. God's revelation shapes character through discipline.

The voice from heaven establishes divine authority; the fire on earth demonstrates divine presence. Neither alone suffices: voice without fire might seem abstract; fire without voice would lack content. Together they communicate both who God is and what He requires. This dual revelation anticipates the incarnation, where the Word became flesh—heavenly truth in earthly form (John 1:14).

Israel heard devarav (דְּבָרָיו, 'his words') from the fire's midst. The fire did not consume the words but conveyed them. This paradox—presence that should destroy instead communicates—reveals grace structuring revelation. God accommodates Himself to human capacity while maintaining His holiness. The unconsumed burning bush (Exodus 3) and the fire at Sinai share this revelatory pattern.

Historical Context

Moses recalls how God used both auditory revelation (voice from heaven) and visual signs (fire on earth) at Mount Horeb to teach Israel. This dual manifestation emphasized God's transcendence (heavenly voice) and immanence (earthly fire). The pedagogical purpose was to train Israel in covenant obedience before entering Canaan.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does the combination of heavenly voice and earthly fire at Sinai anticipate the incarnation, where the Word became flesh?
2. What does it mean that God's revelation is designed to 'instruct' or 'discipline' us, not merely inform us?

Interlinear Text

מִן	הַשְׁמָעִים	שָׁמַעַת	אַתָּה	כָּל	לִשְׁרָאֵל
H4480	Out of heaven	and thou heardest	H853	his voice	that he might instruct
H8064		H8085	H6963		H3256
וְעַל	בְּאַרְצָה	בְּרָאָבָה	אַתָּה	בְּאָשָׁה	בְּגָדוֹלָה
H5921	thee and upon earth	he shewed	H853	fire	thee his great
H776		H7200	H784		H1419
שָׁמַעַת וְעַתָּה	מִתְּוֹךְ	בְּאָשָׁה			his words
and thou heardest	out of the midst	fire			H1697
H8085	H8432	H784			

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 19:9 (Word): And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD.

Exodus 19:19 (Parallel theme): And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice.

Nehemiah 9:13 (Word): Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments:

Deuteronomy 4:33 (Parallel theme): Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live?

Hebrews 12:25 (Parallel theme): See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven:

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