

Deuteronomy 9:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So I turned and came down from the mount, and the mount burned with fire: and the two tables of the covenant were in my two hands.

Analysis

So I turned and came down from the mount, and the mount burned with fire: and the two tables of the covenant were in my two hands. Moses descends from divine glory into human tragedy, carrying God's perfect law to a people already in violation of it. The burning mountain represents God's consuming holiness pursuing the guilty people.

The visual contrast is striking - above, God's glory burns on the mountain; below, Israel's sin burns in their camp. Moses stands between the holy God and the guilty people, prefiguring Christ's mediatorial role. The stone tablets in his hands represent the broken covenant even before he shatters them physically.

That Moses turned from God's presence to face Israel's sin illustrates the mediator's necessary movement between parties. He cannot remain in uninterrupted communion with God while his people need representation and intervention.

The burning mountain provides dramatic backdrop to the unfolding crisis. God's holiness has not diminished; His standards remain absolute. The people's sin is magnified by proximity to divine revelation - they sin not in ignorance but in the very presence of God's manifest glory.

Historical Context

The burning mountain had been the site of God's covenant-making with Israel. There God descended in fire, spoke the Ten Commandments audibly, and summoned Moses to receive the written law. The continued burning testified to God's abiding presence and holiness.

Ancient Near Eastern covenant-making often involved fire and smoke symbolizing divine witness and judgment on covenant-breakers.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does Moses' position between God and the people illustrate Christ's mediatorial work?
2. What does the burning mountain teach us about God's holiness and unapproachable glory?
3. Why is sin more serious when committed in proximity to clear revelation of God's will?
4. How should awareness of God's holy presence shape our behavior and worship?
5. What does it cost faithful leaders to turn from God's presence to deal with people's sin?

Interlinear Text

וָאֵפֶן	וָאֵרָד	מִן	וְהָר	וְהָר	בָּעַר	בָּאֵשׁ
So I turned	and came down	H4480	and the mount	and the mount	burned	with fire
H6437	H3381		H2022	H2022	H1197	H784
וְשְׁתֵּי יָדָיו	לֹחֹת	הַבְּרִית	עַל	וְשְׁתֵּי יָדָיו	יָדָיו	
and the two	tables	of the covenant	H5921	and the two	hands	
H8147	H3871	H1285		H8147	H3027	

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 19:18 (Parallel theme): And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.

Deuteronomy 5:23 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass, when ye heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, (for the mountain did burn with fire,) that ye came near unto me, even all the heads of your tribes, and your elders;

Deuteronomy 4:11 (Parallel theme): And ye came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness.