

Exodus 19:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the LORD said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish.

Analysis

And the LORD said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish.

God sends Moses back down with urgent warning—presumptuous curiosity kills. 'Break through' (יִהְיֶה, yehersu) implies forced breach of boundaries, treating God casually. 'To gaze' (לִירְאוֹת, lir'ot) means to stare, gawk—approaching God as spectacle rather than sovereign. Uzzah's death for touching the ark (2 Samuel 6:6-7) illustrates this principle: familiarity breeds contempt, contempt brings death. The warning 'many perish' (וְנָפְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ רַב, venafal mimmennu rav) shows God's mercy—He warns before judging, providing opportunity to obey. The people's initial fear (v. 16) might wear off, replaced by dangerous curiosity. Reverence must be maintained.

Historical Context

The repeated warnings about boundaries reflect God's holiness and the lethal danger of presumptuous approach. Ancient Israelites, unlike modern readers, would instinctively understand the death penalty for sanctuary violation.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between reverent approach to God and presumptuous 'gazing'?
2. Why does familiarity with God's presence sometimes breed contempt rather than deeper reverence?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוָה	אֶל	מֹשֶׁה	רֵד	הֵעֵד	בְּעָם	פֶּן
said	And the LORD	H413	unto Moses	Go down	charge	the people	H6435
H559	H3068		H4872	H3381	H5749	H5971	
יִהְיֶה וְ	אֶל	יְהוָה	לִרְאֹת	וְנָפְלָו	מִמֶּנּוּ		
lest they break through	H413	And the LORD	to gaze	of them perish	H4480		
H2040		H3068	H7200	H5307			
רַבִּי:							
and many							
H7227							

Additional Cross-References

1 Samuel 6:19 (References Lord): And he smote the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD, even he smote of the people

fifty thousand and threescore and ten men: and the people lamented, because the LORD had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter.

Exodus 3:5 (Parallel theme): And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.

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