

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' (בַּרְאָת, yehersu) implies forced breach of boundaries, treating God casually. 'To gaze' (לִרְאֹת, 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' (רַבָּתִים מַמְּנֵנוּ, 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

Psalm 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

פָּנָים בְּעֵד בְּעֵד מִשְׁאָה הָאֵל יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר
said And the LORD H413 unto Moses H4872 Go down charge the people H6435
H559 H3068 H3381 H5749 H5971

מִתְּבָא לְגַלְגַּל יְהֻרָּס וְאֶל יְהוָה וְתִרְאָה וְתִרְאֶה לְרָא וְתִרְאֶה
lest they break through H413 And the LORD H3068 to gaze H7200 of them perish H4480
H2040 H3381 H5307

בְּרִבָּ�
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.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org