

Exodus 20:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings,
and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and
when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.

Analysis

And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.

Israel 'saw' (רָאִים, ro'im) thunderings—synesthesia, senses overwhelmed. The phenomena (thunder, lightning, trumpet, smoke) terrify rather than attract. 'Removed and stood afar' (וַיָּנֻחוּ וַיַּעֲמֻדוּ, vayyanu'u vaya'amdu)—they trembled and retreated. The natural response to holy God is fear, not familiarity. They've glimpsed what Adam knew in Eden—God is dangerous (in the holy sense). Uzzah dies touching the ark; Nadab and Abihu die offering strange fire; this people would die approaching the mountain. Modern Christianity's chummy God 'who's there for me' is foreign to Scripture. God is consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29); approach requires reverence.

Historical Context

The theophanic phenomena exceed anything Israel experienced in Egypt. The visible, audible manifestation of God's presence confirms the law's divine origin—these aren't Moses' ideas but God's commands.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What does Israel's fear at Sinai teach about proper reverence in worship?
2. How do you balance confidence in approaching God (Hebrews 4:16) with fear of His holiness (Hebrews 12:28-29)?

Interlinear Text

וְכָל H3605	הָעָם H5971	אֶת H7200	וַיֵּרָא H853	קוֹל H6963	וְאֶת H853	הַלַּפִּידִם H3940
And all the people		saw	and the noise		and the lightnings	
וְאֶת H853	קוֹל H6963	הַשָּׁפָר H7782	וְאֶת H853	הַהָר H2022	עֹשֶׂה H6226	וַיֵּרָא H7200
and the noise	of the trumpet		and the mountain	smoking	saw	
הָעָם H5971	וַיֵּצֵאוּ H5128	וַעֲמָדוּ H5975	מִרְחֹק: H7350			
And all the people	it they removed	and stood	afar off			

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 23:23 (Parallel theme): Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off?