

Exodus 20:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.

Analysis

Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.

Stairs are prohibited lest 'nakedness be discovered' (לֹא־תַעֲלֶה בַּמַּעֲלֹת עַל־מִזְבְּחִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִגְלֶה עֲרֻתְךָ עָלָיו, lo-ta'aleh vema'alot al-mizbechi asher lo-tigaleh ervatekha alav). Ancient Near Eastern garments (robes without undergarments) would expose priests climbing steps. Nakedness symbolizes shame (Genesis 3:7); God's presence requires modesty. The altar must preserve dignity—worship isn't exhibitionist. Later, priestly garments include linen undergarments (Exodus 28:42-43) to cover nakedness. The principle is reverence: casual exposure before holy God is inappropriate. Hebrews 4:13 says 'all is naked and exposed before Him'—God sees all, but we approach reverently, not presumptuously.

Historical Context

Pagan worship sometimes involved ritual nakedness and sexual acts. God's command protects worship's dignity and purity. The later bronze altar had a ramp, not steps (Exodus 27:1-8), implementing this command.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What does the prohibition on exposing nakedness at the altar teach about reverence in worship?
2. How might modern worship violate the principle of modesty and reverence before God?

Interlinear Text

וְלֹא	תֵעָלֶה ה	בְּמַעַל ת	עַל	מִזְבֵּחַ י	אֲשֶׁר	לֹא
H3808	Neither shalt thou go up	by steps	H5921	unto mine altar	H834	H3808
	H5927	H4609		H4196		
תִּגָּלֶה ה	עֲרוֹתְךָ	עָלָיו:				
be not discovered	that thy nakedness	H5921				
H1540	H6172					

Additional Cross-References

1 Peter 1:16 (Parallel theme): Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

Psalms 89:7 (Parallel theme): God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.

Ecclesiastes 5:1 (Sacrifice): Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.