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Do Not Have God Speak to Us or We Will Die

20: 18-21

Do not have God speak to us or we will die DIG: What link do you see between 20:1-17 and 18-21? In what sense were the people tested? How was the fear of God to motivate them?

REFLECT: At the end of his life King Solomon wrote these words. After looking back on my whole life, here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13). How are those words true for you?

The prologue describes **Isra'el's** reaction to the scene at **Mount Sinai**. **God** has appeared to them in a cloud and fire on top of the mountain, and **He** has delivered the basis of the Book of the Covenant, the Ten Commandments, to them. Now, how will they respond to it? Earlier **they** had said: **We will do everything God has said (19:8)**. Was that still true?



When the people heard the voice of **God**, they perceived it as **thunder and lightning**, the sound of a **trumpet** getting louder and **smoke** around Mount Sinai. As a result, **they** were shook to the very core and **trembled with fear (20:18a)**. They were so **afraid** that they fled from **the mountain**. When the commandments were given to **the Israelites they stood at the foot of the mountain (19:17)**. But now we find them standing at a **distance**. The Hebrew for **at a distance** normally means *far away (First Samuel 26:13; Isaiah 22:3 and 23:7)*. But why did **they** run away? Like **Isaiah** when confronted with a holy and perfect **God**, **they** realized **their** sin before **Him**. It was as if **they** also said, “Woe

to us. We are ruined. For we are **a people of unclean lips, and our eyes have seen the King (Isaiah 6:5). Their** guilt overwhelmed **them**.

They were so afraid that **they said to Moses**, who was **their** mediator: **Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die (20:18b-19). They** simply could not bear it (**Hebrews 12:19**). It was too difficult to face **the Accuser** and the accusation; **the Judge** and the judgment all at the same instant.

Therefore, **Moses** responded and **said to the people**, **“Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning” (20:20)**. The Torah presented an impossible standard because the Torah of **ADONAI** is perfect. If you were trying to be saved by keeping the Torah you would have to be perfect. If you are not perfect, it cannot save you. I thank **God** that under grace **He** can save a poor sinner like me. Grace reveals something of the goodness and wonder of our **God**.⁴⁰⁰

What kind of **test** is **Moses** talking about? The Hebrew verb *nsb*, often translated *to test*, should not be understood in the sense of *finding out* how **the Israelites** will perform or react to something. **God** is not revealing **Himself** in **thunder and lightening** to see how **they** will react. It is much more convincing to translate the word here as *experience*. In other words, it is as if **God** was saying, “Do not be afraid. I am giving you a taste of **Myself** so that this memory will stick **with you to keep you from sinning.**” The people’s **fear** was to be tempered by the fact that **God** is giving them this *experience* for a reason. A debilitating **fear** would eventually give way to a healthy **fear**, one that would result in faithfulness on **their** part and the part of other nations as well.⁴⁰¹

The word **fear** used here does not mean a sense of terror or dread, but rather a reverence that leads to obedience (**Deuteronomy 4:10**). Their **fear of God** should have caused them to bow down before **Him** in reverence and awe. Sadly, **Isra’el** would soon lose **their fear of Him**. This would be a recurrent theme in **her** history.

The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was (20:21). From this point on **YHVH** would communicate only with **Moses**, and then **Moses** would relate all that **God** had **said** to him, **to the people**. Once through **the thick darkness** of **smoke**, which represented the presence of **God**, **he** would see the Sh’khinah glory. **Moses** then made another trip up **Mount Sinai** for a longer visit, to receive the commandments that would be called the Book of the Covenant.

In our natural state, we all stand quaking at the foot of **Mount Sinai**. Although we were not there with **the Israelites** (and we need to be careful not to allegorize), the fact is, that each

of us stands condemned of living and being disobedient to **the Creator**. In our unregenerate state we stand guilty as charged. This is the verdict: “Guilty, guilty, guilty!” And that ought to make us tremble and **fear** for our lives. However, those who have new life in **Christ** do not approach **Mount Sinai** with condemnation, but they come to **Mount Tziyon** under the blood of **Jesus. Messiah Yeshua** took **His** people’s debt in the Torah and nailed it to the cross (see the commentary on **Hebrews, to see link click [Dc](#) - The Earthly Sinai and the Heavenly Tziyon**).⁴⁰²