

Exegetical Notes, Exodus 19:20-25
“The Holy Other”

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Exodus 19:20-25

Verse 20-22

YHWH descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up and YHWH said to him, “Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see YHWH and many of them perish. Even the priests, who approach YHWH, must consecrate themselves, or YHWH will break out against them.”

- On the third day, in accord with all that he had said, God descended on the mountain and called Moses to him. In accord with YHWH’s instructions, limits had been set so that the people would not come up onto the mountain while God was physically present there. Even though God’s instructions had been explained to the people clearly, and the people had agreed to follow the instructions of God in everything, God’s first concern was the people would not keep the clearly set limits. So after calling Moses up onto the mountain, God’s first instruction is that Moses go back down to the people to reestablish the limits that God had set.
- The use of the word “priest” is problematic as the priesthood had not yet been established. The fact is that it will be established in the words that God is about to speak to Moses. However, at this utterance, the priesthood does not exist. God’s point is that even after the establishment of the priesthood, the priest will not be permitted to approach God without first consecrating themselves. No one may approach God without proper preparation.
- God says that if the people, even the priest, violate the distinction between he and them, God will “break out” against them. The word means that he will destroy them.

Verse 23

Moses said to YHWH, “The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, because you yourself warned us, ‘Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy.’”

- Moses contends that it is not necessary for him to do as God instructed because limits had already been set around the mountain as God had ordered. His contention was that the people clearly understood the limits and, therefore, would not violate them.

Verse 24-25

YHWH replied, “Go down and bring Aaron, up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to YHWH, or he will break out against them.” So Moses went down to the people and told them.

- God reiterates his instructions. Moses is to go down and warn the people not to come up on the mountain.
- God adds a second detail. Moses is to return to God with his brother, Aaron.
- Moses followed the instructions of God. He went down and warned the people not to come up on the mountain.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *The Holy Other*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)