



Moses at the Sinai by Marc Chagall

The Dramatic Bestowal of the Law on Sinai

Firebolts and Lightning

In this theatric passage from Exodus, the terrifying God of the Old Testament bestows the law at Sinai for the first time. As the mountain quakes and belches fire, Moses gathers the people at its base to await the word of the Lord.

שמות פרק י"ט

^א וְהָיוּ נֹכְחִים, לַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי: כִּי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי, יֵרֵד יְהוָה לְעֵינֵי כָל-הָעָם--עַל-הַר סִינַי. ^ב וְהִגַּבְתָּ אֶת-הָעָם סָבִיב לֵאמֹר, הִשְׁמְרוּ לָכֶם עֲלוֹת בְּהָר וּנְגַע בְּקַצְהוּ: כָּל-הַנֹּגַע בְּהָר, מוֹת יוּמָת. ^ג לֹא-תִגַּע בּוֹ יָד, כִּי-סָקוֹל יִסְקַל אוֹ-יָרֵה יִירֶה--אִם-בְּהֵמָה אִם-אִישׁ, לֹא יַחֲיֶה; בְּמִשְׁךָ, הַיָּבֵל, הֵמָּה, יַעֲלוּ בְהָר. ^ד וַיֵּרֵד מֹשֶׁה מִן-הָהָר, אֶל-הָעָם; וַיְקַדֵּשׁ, אֶת-הָעָם, וַיַּכְבְּסוּ, שְׂמֹלֵתָם. ^ה וַיֹּאמֶר, אֶל-הָעָם, הָיוּ נֹכְחִים, לְשִׁלֹּשֶׁת יָמִים: אֶל-תִּגְשׁוּ, אֶל-אִשָּׁה. ^ו וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בַּהִיַת הַבֶּקָר, וַיְהִי קֹלֶת וּבְרָקִים וַעֲנַן כָּבֵד עַל-הָהָר, וְקֹל שֹׁפָר, חֲזָק מְאֹד; וַיִּחַרֵד כָּל-הָעָם, אֲשֶׁר בְּמַחֲנֵה. ^ז וַיּוֹצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת-הָעָם לִקְרֹאת הָאֱלֹהִים, מִן-הַמַּחֲנֵה; וַיִּתְיַצְּבוּ, בְּתַחְתִּית הָהָר. ^ח וְהָר סִינַי, עָשָׂן כְּלוֹ, מִפְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר יֵרֵד עָלָיו יְהוָה, בְּאֵשׁ; וַיַּעַל עֲשָׂנוּ כְּעָשָׂן הַכֹּבֵשֶׁן, וַיִּחַרֵד כָּל-הָהָר מְאֹד. ^ט וַיְהִי קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר, הוֹלֵךְ וְחֲזָק מְאֹד; מֹשֶׁה יְדַבֵּר, וְהָאֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֶנּוּ בְּקוֹל. ^י וַיֵּרֵד יְהוָה עַל-הָר סִינַי, אֶל-רֹאשׁ הָהָר; וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה לְמֹשֶׁה אֶל-רֹאשׁ הָהָר, וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה.

Exodus 19

¹¹ and be ready against the third day; for the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai. ¹² And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying: Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it; whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death; ¹³ no hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live; when the ram's horn soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount." ¹⁴ And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their garments. ¹⁵ And he said unto the people: "Be ready against the third day; come not near a woman." ¹⁶ And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of a horn exceeding loud; and all the people that were in the camp trembled. ¹⁷ And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. ¹⁸ Now mount Sinai was altogether on smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. ¹⁹ And when the voice of the horn waxed louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by a voice.

Source: <http://www.sefarim.fr/Pentateuque Exode 19 11.aspx>