

Deuteronomy 4:21-24

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-4/deuteronomy-421-24/>

Alluding to the incident that prevented him from entering Canaan, Moses asks the Israelites to carefully obey God's laws in order to avoid making any graven image to represent Him. Failure to obey would result in severe punishment because God is a consuming fire.

For the third time Moses mentions the incident that prevented him from entering the Promised Land (see 1:37; 3:26). According to [Numbers 20](#), God commanded Moses to speak to the rock to bring water for the thirsty people. Instead of speaking to the rock, Moses struck it twice out of anger (v. 8). Such an act not only demonstrated Moses's lack of obedience to Yahweh, but also dishonored the LORD. God was not treated as "holy in the sight of the sons of Israel" (vv. 10-13).

Therefore, in [Deuteronomy 4:21-22](#), Moses stated, "*Now the LORD was angry with me on your account, and swore that I would not cross the Jordan, and that I would not enter the good land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance. For I will die in the land, I shall not cross the Jordan, but you shall cross and take possession of this good land.*" Negative consequences always follow disobedience to the Suzerain Yahweh. Moses, Israel's leader, was prevented from entering and possessing the land of Canaan because he showed a lack of obedience to Yahweh and dishonored Him in the sight of the people.

Moses' s purpose for alluding to this incident again here is obvious: he wanted to guard the Israelites against any form of disobedience to God so that they might not be denied access to Canaan or be removed from it. That this was the author's intent is clear from the fact that he was about to die there in Moab. Therefore, it was an urgency for him to remind the Israelites of what happened to him so that they might pay close attention to God's precepts. In other words, Israel's leader (Moses) was saying something like: "If this can happen to me, it can surely happen to anyone of you, if you dishonor the LORD your God."

It is quite remarkable that the clearly strong and capable leader (Moses) is pronouncing to the people his own failure as an example. This is a good illustration why scripture calls Moses the most humble man on the face of the

earth ([Numbers 12:3](#)). Further, it is amazing that Moses pronounces that he is staying behind to die.

Having alluded to the incident that prevented him from possessing Canaan, Moses strongly declared, “*So watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything.*” The Israelites were to be watchful to observe all the stipulations of God’s covenant in order not to make any *graven image* to represent Him. Doing so would reduce the Creator to the level of His creatures. Such an act would be inappropriate because it would bring dishonor the LORD.

The warning given to Israel was strong because Moses knew God’s discipline can be fatal. In fact, having already experienced God’s judgment by being excluded from those who would possess Canaan, Moses did not want the people to fall under a similar judgment. For this reason, he told them that Yahweh is a *consuming fire*, and a *jealous God*. The phrase “consuming fire” refers to God’s holiness and judgment. Fire is used to create, to refine and to consume. God does all these things, each as appropriate. In this case the adjective “*consuming*” likely emphasizes God’s judging power to eliminate unrighteousness and cleanse it from the earth.

Not only is the LORD a *consuming fire*, He is also a *jealous God*. The adjective “*jealous*” does not mean that God is envious of what belongs to others. Rather, it means that God wants to preserve what belongs to Him. In such a covenant relationship where the superior or suzerain God redeemed His vassals out of the *iron furnace, from Egypt*, it is clear why He would demand exclusive love and faithfulness from them ([Deuteronomy 6:5](#)). God has chosen the Israelites to be His “own possession” and has set them apart just for that purpose ([Exodus 19:5](#); [Deuteronomy 7:6](#)). Therefore, since Yahweh alone is sovereign, He did not want to share His “glory” to anyone else, nor His “praise to graven images” ([Isaiah 42:8](#)). That is why He required exclusive loyalty from His servants.

Biblical Text:

²¹ Now the Lord was angry with me on your account, and swore that I would not cross the Jordan, and that I would not enter the good land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance. ²² For I will die in this land, I shall not cross the Jordan, but you shall cross and take possession of this good land. ²³ So watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of the Lord your God which He made with you,

and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything against which the Lord your God has commanded you. ²⁴ For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.