

Deuteronomy 4:24

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.

Analysis

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Two divine attributes ground Moses' warning: God is esh okhelah (אֵשׁ אֲכַלָּה, 'consuming fire') and El qanna (אֵל קָנָן, 'a jealous God'). Fire in Scripture represents both God's holiness that purifies and His wrath that destroys what opposes Him. At Sinai, Israel witnessed this fire firsthand (Exodus 24:17); Hebrews 12:29 applies this same description to the God revealed in Christ.

Divine jealousy (qanna) is not petty envy but the righteous zeal of covenant love that will not share what belongs exclusively to Him. As a husband rightly refuses to share his wife's affections with another, God refuses divided loyalty. This jealousy flows from His worthiness—He alone deserves worship—and His love—He desires His people's undivided devotion for their good.

The connection between these attributes is crucial: because God is holy fire, idolatry invites destruction; because God is jealous, idolatry constitutes spiritual adultery. Both attributes serve as warnings, but they also reveal God's passionate commitment to His people. A God who did not care about our worship would be distant and indifferent. The jealous, consuming God is intimately concerned with our hearts' allegiances.

Historical Context

This characterization of God as 'consuming fire' recalls the theophany at Mount Horeb/Sinai where God descended in fire (Exodus 19:18, 24:17). Moses reminds Israel of God's jealous nature regarding worship, particularly relevant as they prepare to enter Canaan where Baal worship and other idolatries were pervasive among the indigenous peoples they would encounter.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does understanding God's jealousy as righteous covenant love rather than petty envy change your perspective on His commands for exclusive worship?
2. In what ways does the image of God as 'consuming fire' both warn you and comfort you regarding His holiness?

Interlinear Text

אֱלֹהִים	אֵשׁ	אֲלֹהָ יְהוָה	יְהוָה	אֲכָל	אֵל	אֵל ה וְאֵל
H3588	H784	H430	H398	H1931	H410	
For the LORD	fire	thy God	is a consuming		God	

לֹא
even a jealous
H7067

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 12:29 (References God): For our God is a consuming fire.

Nahum 1:6 (Parallel theme): Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him.

Exodus 24:17 (References Lord): And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel.

Deuteronomy 9:3 (References God): Understand therefore this day, that the LORD thy God is he which goeth over before thee; as a consuming fire he shall destroy them, and he shall bring them down before thy face: so shalt thou drive them out, and destroy them quickly, as the LORD hath said unto thee.

Isaiah 33:14 (Parallel theme): The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?

Exodus 34:14 (References God): For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God:

1 Corinthians 10:22 (References Lord): Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?

Deuteronomy 6:15 (References God): (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth.

Exodus 20:5 (References God): Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

Zephaniah 1:18 (References Lord): Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.