

# Deuteronomy 4:11-24

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] of the law, which is the whole reasoning for the book of Deuteronomy, because this is Moses' final address to the people of the Lord before they go into the promised land, his final address, because we know that at the end of the book of Deuteronomy, Moses dies. He ascends Mount Pisgah, he dies at the top, and it says that God buries him where no man knows. And the last chapter is really a lamentation or a mourning of Moses' death. But until we get there, we have Moses here, as he declared in the first chapter, seeking to expound or to make clear the law of God. And he is hoping or aiming to clearly teach God's standard of living to the people of God. There's not some theoretical thing, it's not just some truth that's good for the wilderness, but this is what God wants them to put in practice in the promised land, right? God gave them these truths at Mount Sinai, he forged them through the wilderness wanderings, he showed himself faithful, he showed himself gracious and kind, and sure he showed himself righteous and judging as well.
- [ 1 : 0 6 ] And now as they're preparing to go into the promised land, the truths that they have been taught there have application over here. They are to be lived out. One of the things that we saw last time we were together and we looked at the first part of chapter four is these truths were to be lived out so that other people would see them. It was something that was supposed to be put on display. And Moses tells them that people will see how you behave, they will see how you act, they will see how you live differently. So we looked at how they were a set apart people. We looked at how they were intentionally called out to be set apart so that God not could put them on display. It was never to be about the Israelite nation. It was never to be all about all the nation of Israel. It was to be about the God of the nation of Israel, right? The way they lived, the things they did, even we call them all the laws, the sundry laws and the purity laws and all these laws in the book of Leviticus that are there. Mainly they are there. Some of them, there are health benefits, right? So, I mean, don't eat rodents. Don't eat anything that a mouse went across, things like that because it carries diseases. We understand that.
- [ 2 : 1 2 ] We understand this side of science. But there are also just some reasons that God was setting them apart. He was giving them standards and regulations that would make them look different than the people they were going to go live among. And the reason is, is because he wanted their difference to draw attention so that people would notice his blessings and his provisions and his goodness and his mercy. God is drawing people to himself through his dealings with his people, right? This is how God draws people. We speak quite often in scripture that, that Jesus woos us. The woos, wooing, it's one of my, if you ever do a StrengthsFinders test, I don't know if any of you have ever done it. There's this book called StrengthsFinders. But out there, I would actually walk you through it, but you have to buy the book to get the code to take your StrengthsFinder, okay?

And one of my strengths is wooing, W-O-O, winning others over. It's not necessarily always a good thing. It just means I like, I'm a people pleaser. I like for people to like me.

[ 3 : 17 ] So when I walk into a room and I walk into a place where I don't know anybody, I want to lighten the mood. I want people to like me. I want people to, I want to win them over.

And sometimes that can be a bad trait. Sometimes it can be a great trait. Christ woos us, and that's never bad. He draws us to Himself, right? He shows us His love.

He shows us His concern. Well, how does He do that? Through His Word and through His people, right? Through setting somebody apart. So now, as Moses has introduced that, we'll see this evening in Deuteronomy 4, verses 11 through 24, just continuing that theme.

We'll see those things which set them apart. That which sets apart God's people. Deuteronomy 4, starting in verse 11. Well, let's go back to verse 10 so that we can be sure to have it in context.

Moses says, Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, which is Mount Sinai, when the Lord said to me, Assemble the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so they may learn to fear me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.

[ 4 : 29 ] Verse 11. You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens, darkness, cloud, and thick gloom. Then the Lord spoke to you from the midst of the fire.

You heard the sound of words, but you saw no form, only a voice. So He declared to you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone.

The Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments that you might perform them in the land where you are going over to possess it. So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, so that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the earth.

And beware not to lift up your eyes to the heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars and all the hosts of heaven and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.

But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace from Egypt to be a people for His own possession as today. Now the Lord was angry with me on your account and swore that I would not cross the Jordan, that I would not enter the good land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.

[ 5 : 50 ] For I will die in this land. I shall not cross the Jordan, but you shall cross and take possession of this good land. 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.

Here it is, Deuteronomy 4.24. For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. Deuteronomy 4, verses 11 through 24.

I want you to take just a few moments with me this evening, and I want you to see that which sets them apart. They are a set-apart people. And not only are they set apart because God has called them out, but here I want you to see four unique things from the text which literally sets them apart from everyone else around them.

And these are not only true for the nation of Israel, these are true for the people of God today. One of the great things that we understand when we read Scripture is the Bible tells but one story, right?

Always remember that. The Bible is not full of a bunch of stories, plural. The Bible tells one story, and it tells that one story over and over and over and over again in different genres, in different historical settings, through different people.

[ 7 : 11 ] But the story is God's concern and redemption of man from the slavery of sin. The story is God's interaction with His people. This is not the complete account of all of history.

This is the account of God's interactions with man throughout history. And that's the big difference. There are some historical facts that we do not have recorded for us in Scripture.

But what we have is the full record of God's interaction with man throughout history. And we see these things that apply in Deuteronomy as much so as we see them in the book of Romans or 1 and 2 Corinthians or the Gospel of John or even 1, 2, and 3 John.

We may be drawn more to 1 John, which speaks of love of brethren and all these things. But what we see is the theme that runs through Deuteronomy is the same theme that runs through 1 John.

And that is that God's people have certain attributes which set them apart from everyone else. And them being set apart is what God uses to draw others in.

[ 8 : 16 ] And I want you to see this evening four of them from this text. Number one, we see it is that which they had witnessed. Those things which they had witnessed set them apart.

Because he says, as he is talking about them being a different people and how God has commanded them, we know that verse 10 says, Remember that day you were at the mountain. And he gave clear direction here.

Remember the day the Lord called you before him so that you may teach it to your children. And we spoke of, last time we were together, the importance of proclaiming to the generation that follows after us, right? Proclaiming these truths.

Let me just go ahead and say right here, those Ebenezers you have in your life. I know that's not a word we use very often. As a matter of fact, when I say Ebenezer, many of you all of a sudden are thinking of Scrooge and all these wonderful things.

And there's a reason why the man Ebenezer in the play Scrooge is named Ebenezer is because he actually becomes the source of help. And Ebenezer literally means my stone of help. So there's a reasoning for that name.

[ 9 : 18 ] But Ebenezer, here I raise my Ebenezer, is a stone of help. And those are things that we look back to and we remember, right? It's things we point back to. See here, Moses is not pointing back to Egyptian slavery, right?

He's not saying go all the way back to slavery. No, he says go back to where you really had this face-to-face encounter with God. Because that's really where your story starts.

You know, if you know Christ as your Lord and Savior, as Jesus says to Nicodemus in John chapter 3, all things have become new, you have been born again. Your story starts at that encounter.

Now, we remember things that happened prior to that encounter, right? I accepted Christ when I was 20, about a month before my 21st birthday. So, 20 plus years ago now.

So, you know, look back, and I can tell you the things that happened in my life prior to that day. But that's not where my story in Christ begins.

[ 10 : 24 ] Because the Bible says that he's cast those things out into the sea of forgetfulness. God has the power to forget, which is awesome. Because I don't have that capacity, and neither do you. We have this thing called conscience, and we have this enemy that wants to remind us.

But he doesn't point them back to Egypt. He points them back to the encounter. He says, that's where you're Ebenezer. That's where you stop. That's where you start.

I had this real bad habit when I told my story. That's the way I like to refer to my testimony. You can call your testimony whatever you want to. But my story, I would always kind of, I got there in a manner, right?

I arrived at that point in history of giving my life completely to Christ because of circumstances. But I always, when I first came to Christ, I had this tendency and the odor I got, and the more in the word I understood.

I look back, and you know, Paul tells his story five times in the New Testament. The Damascus road encounter where Paul met Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. He tells it five times in the New Testament. Five times.

[ 11 : 24 ] Five times. Each time he adds a little bit more to the account. Acts chapter 9 is the first time it's ever recorded. But after that, every subsequent time, he adds more to the account. You know what he does not add? He never adds anything from that point back.

My tendency was to always talk about what I used to be instead of who I met. Paul, when he tells this story, he's always talking about who he met, who he met, who he met, who he met, who he met. And this is what Moses is doing.

You're, we're not going all the way back. Sure, remember that you were slaves in Egypt, but your story starts at Mount Horeb or Mount Sinai. Same place. When you met the Lord, he takes them back to that which they had witnessed.

Because look at what he says. He says in verse 11, he says, you came near. Just stop right there. Just for a moment. I know it's hard for us to wrap our minds around this.

The God who spoke all things into existence called them near. You came near. First thing he wants them to remember is that they drew near to God.

[ 12 : 32 ] And they knew they were near him because look at this. Look at this manifestation. You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heaven's darkness, cloud and a thick gloom.

This glorious display of God's manifest presence. We have to say manifest presence because God was not confined to one place at one time.

God is omnipresent. He is everywhere all the time. But at that location, he manifested his presence. That is, he opened man's eyes up to the reality. He was there. And every time in scripture, we see someone who realizes they are in the presence of God, man always has the same response.

They fall on their face. Because of the awesome wonder of being in his presence. And being overwhelmed with the reality I'm near him.

the very thing, the first thing that sets them apart is the fact that they have been near the presence of God.

[ 13 : 46 ] They had seen it. They saw the manifestations of his being. They saw the splendor. Did they see a form? No. They saw the darkness and the fire and the thick smoke and the gloom and the wonder of it so much that they trembled as Hebrews told us.

And even Moses said, I'm afraid. I'm terribly frightened. They saw it. And throughout the wilderness for the next 40 years or 38 years, every day they would wake up and see again.

As a matter of fact, there's the pillar of cloud by day, pillar of fire by night. There's the Shekinah glory over the tabernacle. There's the manna falling out of heaven. There's the meat that rains into the camp.

I mean, over and over and over again, there are all these things that they witness. And things that they have witnessed is what sets them apart. They have seen things that others have not.

The reality is, this isn't an Old Testament principle nor is this just a New Testament principle. This is an authentic principle of all of God's people.

[ 14 : 53 ] The very thing which sets the people of God apart are those things which they have witnessed. And the witness comes as a direct result of being near God.

Nick Ripken is a gentleman who has served for a multitude of years on the mission field, ended up being employed later on by, I think, his International Mission Board. I could be completely wrong in another missions organization.

He did a lot of research and a lot of study of worldwide missions. And his primary focus, he wrote a couple of books really that spoke of his focus of sharing Christ and sharing the faith in areas of persecution that were closed to the gospel.

And I've got a couple of them in my office there, but in one of his books, he highlights how he was in an area that was just closed to the gospel. And he is, by closed to the gospel, you know, they can't openly proclaim Jesus Christ.

And yet there's a church there, this underground church, and he's meeting with these pastors and he is sitting in this room and these pastors are gathered around him and the pastors are just talking and they're just having a conversation and Nick is there and he's listening to them.

[ 16 : 03 ] And Nick finally stops them after about a full day of talking because in his own words, he said, they were talking about things that were literally blowing my mind. I mean, talking about miraculous events, how God was working in their life, what God was doing, what the amazing things that he was doing.

And he said, things that we don't see in America. Now this is just a couple of years ago, this book came out, okay? So it's not like ancient history, even though I usually refer to old works, this is a current work, okay?

And he was sitting there going, you know, these things were just crazy to me. It's the insanity of obedience is the name of the book. There's another one called The Insanity of God, but it's just speaking of that.

But in this book, The Insanity of Obedience, he says, I asked these pastors, I stopped them and I said, have you guys ever thought about writing a book? And the pastors all kind of looked at me and said, what do you mean? He said, you have so many miraculous accounts, you could fill a book with what you've seen God do just in your midst and people all over the world would buy it.

And he said, this old gruff, rugged looking pastor walked up to him and said, Nick, every morning when you get up in America and you look out your window, he says, is the sun coming up?

[ 17 : 14 ] Nick said, yeah, there's sunrise every morning. He said, every evening when you look out that same window, do you see the sun setting? He said, yeah, sun sets. He said, to us, these things are just expectations.

Just as you expect to see the sunrise and the sunset, we expect to see God do these things. These are the things which set us apart.

And that's what makes the people of God different throughout history. That which they've seen. I'm afraid in our American Christian culture, we have become to normalize the wonder of God's manifest presence.

and by that I mean we count it as common. And we're not awestruck anymore. Every now and then, now I know, my mind thinks a little bit differently and it's okay.

I'm a little off tilt. Every now and then, I'll see if I can find, nobody make fun of me, okay, the smallest flower I can find growing in a field somewhere. And all of a sudden, every one of you are judging.

[ 18 : 32 ] But that's okay. You can call me Mamsy Pamsy if you want to. But if you take that itty bitty flower and you look at its petals, you know what's amazing? They are perfectly symmetrical.

Down to the last detail. God designs everything in perfect order. There's no happenstance. These are things we run over with a bush hog or a lawnmower and try to get them out of our way, right?

But they're perfectly created. And it's when God's people realize the things they're witnessing. That's what sets them apart. Moses says, that which sets you apart is what you have witnessed.

Number two, not only was it the events they had witnessed, it was the word they received. That which was setting them apart was the word they had received. Look at this.

Just in case, and I remember when we were going through the book of Exodus, we cross-referenced this passage because the best commentary on Scripture is always Scripture, right? So we needed to make sure we came to a greater understanding of it.

[ 19 : 34 ] But just in case we think that the only person who heard God speak was Moses, and then Moses gave the Ten Commandments, and then he came down and gave it to the people, and then the people began to play. To really highlight how awful that idolatry with the golden calf was, because, you know, when Moses is up on the mountain for 40 days, that's when they're making the golden calf.

Prior to that, the entire congregation of God's people had heard God speak. Don't ever forget that. Because he said, not only did you see the mountain, he said, you heard the Lord speak to you.

Look at what verse 13 says. So he declared to you the covenant which he commanded you to perform. That is, the Ten Commandments. So he declared, he commanded.

He says in verse 12, you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form, only a voice. So they heard the Ten Commandments. So it's not like they didn't know what the standard was.

They didn't know what God's expectation was. The covenant agreement that God made with them was a verbal, audible covenant. They heard God speak to them.

[ 20 : 41 ] That is when they said, this is too much, we can't stand it, we're in the presence of a holy God, as we have in Exodus chapter 20. But what we see is, they heard the word of God, and then they received the word of God, because it says, he also engraved it on two tablets of stone.

He wrote them on two tablets of stone. The Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments that you might perform them in the land which you were going over to possess it. So what is he saying?

You heard the word of God, and then you literally received the word of God written by the finger of God. Now I know Moses broke the first one, but he went back and got another one, right? And he had the word of God recorded, and then they had the word of God taught to them.

The very thing that was setting them apart was not only what they had seen, but also what they had heard and what they were learning. It was the declared word of God. It was the standard.

They had witnessed some amazing things, but hey, listen, people see amazing things all the time. But in connection with what they had witnessed, it was united with the declaration of the word.

[ 21 : 50 ] You can pick the same flower out of the field and stand in a maze and give me a scientific reasoning for why they are so symmetrical, and you could give me this scientific reasoning about how everything came into being, or you could take that flower and you could set it beside the scripture and it says that God puts everything together, and then you go, oh, wow.

Because it's only when you unite it with the word received does that which we have witnessed really begin to take root. And this is exactly what happened. God manifested his presence, and then he declared his word.

Again, it's a consistent thing throughout scripture, right? What does the book of Acts say? From what they heard and saw. From what they heard and saw. Which means any time God's presence is manifested, it is usually, or it ought to be, united with his word being declared.

Because that is what sets us apart. Because it is the word they had received. And this word had a purpose. It was to be lived out in their life. It was to be applied. It was to be learned.

It was to be dwelt upon. It was to be, you know, taught to the generation that followed. This word had a place in their life, and it was going to radically set them apart from everyone else.

[ 23 : 04 ] Number three. It is that which they had witnessed is the word they had received. Number three is the way in which they worshipped. It's the way in which they worshipped. Because Moses starts here in verse 15.

So watch yourselves carefully. Since you do not see any form on the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire so that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any weaned bird that flies in the sky, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water or below the earth, and see the sun and the moon and the stars and all the hosts of heaven and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the Lord your God has allotted and this radically set them apart.

Everyone else around them worshipped some type of image, right? You had the bells, you had Asherah, you had just a number, even the golden calf.

I mean, they didn't just randomly come up with a golden calf because in Egypt the cow was seen as being that which carried the deity or the God between its horns. It was one of the many gods in Egypt.

So what they had done is they took Egyptian theology and united it with their covenant relationship with God. We're going to give God something to ride on and God said, I ain't riding on that cow, you're going to drink it, right? So that's what he said.

[ 24 : 26 ] The ziggurat in Genesis chapter 11 where you have the dispersion of all God's people and everybody together, they weren't just building a tower, they were making a name for themselves and they were building this tower, this ziggurat that was like staircase because the theology there is we're going to build stairs to heaven and take our seat there because we belong above everything else and God says that's not going to happen.

Everyone else around where they were going had something they could point to. If someone says what do you worship they could say that except for the people of God.

What do you worship? I can't show you. What does he look like? I don't know. Well, what image does he bear? I have no idea. I've never seen him. We like to construct and fashion and form idols and we do because that means that we can wrap our mind around that which we are worshipping or serving.

That's why man likes to do that because man likes to be able to at least to be able to handle it and say it is this. This is what it is. This is what it looks like and it gives us a sense of control over that or a sense of authority because then when I don't want this to be around I can just put it over here behind this plant and then I can do whatever I want to as long as this doesn't see it because now I can control it and now I understand it and we think if we can't construct it we can't understand it and God says that's right you can't understand me.

What did Jesus tell the woman at the well? The Samaritan woman at the well? There will come a day when those who worship God true will worship in spirit and truth. You're not going to be able to define me.

[ 25 : 59 ] Let me just go ahead and help you out. Quit trying to define God or quit trying to completely understand him. I've read a lot.

I've made my brain smoke at times on things and each and every time I come away I still don't get it. And that's the point.

That's the point. Because like I've told you if I can figure it out then he cannot be bigger than me. If I have the ability to figure him out then he cannot be above my understanding or my problems.

I don't want a God that I can figure out. I don't. I want someone who's bigger than me. I want someone that's greater than me.

I want to worship someone that's beyond me. And what God says here is don't give anyone or anything don't make anything to represent me because I am so much more other than.

[ 27 : 21 ] Other than what? Other than whatever you can think. Right? Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue. They build this huge statue. He's bigger than that.

Right? Daniel sees the dreams and the vision and all these things. All these images that are so massive that reach to the heavens he's bigger than that.

He'll never be represented by anything. Jesus had to lay aside his glory to take on our humanity and still we can't figure Jesus out.

Right? And that's the point. God's people are set apart in the way that they worship. We don't go to the tombs of individuals and worship there.

We don't know where the tomb of Moses is and that's okay. We're not really 100% sure which one of the tombs Jesus was laid in though if you went to Israel they would take you to a number of tombs and say this could have been it, this could have been it, this might have been it.

[ 28 : 28 ] And that's okay because he's not in the tomb anyway. We don't worship venerated locales or spaces and I think it's intentional that Jerusalem doesn't hold the position it did in the times of Christ.

Could you imagine the Mecca city it would be of wanting to draw people in? God just scattered that. We're not centralized in one location.

We don't have to take pilgrimage. We don't have to go anywhere. We don't have to go to a certain cathedral or certain dome. We don't have to go to a certain location to get closer to God.

That's awesome. The way God's people worship is so much different than any other religion.



And that's awesome. And it sets them apart. Completely sets them apart. Fourth and finally, that which sets them apart is the warning they heed.

[ 29 : 31 ] The warning that they must heed. Because Moses says, be careful not to fall short. And he gives this command because of verse 20. He says, but the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace from Egypt to be a people for his own possession as today.

So he's saying, you know, all these things are because you're his people. Never forget this, that God initiated this, right? This is God initiated. He took you out of there so that you would be his people.

People don't just come out of fiery furnaces on their own. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were alive in the fiery furnace, but they didn't come out until they were told to. Right? You don't come out on your own. He said, God took you out of the furnace to be his people.

So be careful. Look at the warning. The warning is Deuteronomy 424. For the Lord, your God, is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

I've told you over and over again and it's kind of odd. That's my favorite verse for a number of years. I would still count it and run my top one or two. And this is a verse that's repeated in scripture.

[ 30 : 39 ] For the Lord, your God, is a jealous God, a consuming fire. I always thought when I first started pastoral ministry, pastors always had this, like Tony Evans' Urban Alternative.

There's all these names of their ministry. I thought, I'm going to call mine Consuming Fire Ministries. It doesn't look real good. People don't know if they want that. Seems a little over the top.

I actually had a banner up one time. We made a banner Consuming Fire Ministries and set up in an event. So did barbecue. So I guess I didn't even cook the barbecue there. Somebody else was. That was before my barbecue days.

But it was good. But yeah, I mean, just because of this, because God calls us to heed his warning. And just to bring the point home, Moses uses himself as an example.

Moses says, Now the Lord was angry with me on your account and swore that I would not cross the Jordan and I would not enter the good land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance. For I would die in this land.

[ 31 : 41 ] I shall not cross the Jordan, but you shall cross and take possession of the good land. Now is Moses shifting blame here? No. Moses lost his cool and Moses forgot the fact that the Lord his God is a jealous God of consuming fire because he was mad at the people.

The people instigated it but Moses is being held accountable for his counteraction, right? So in order to prove the point, Moses is saying, even me, you know, Mr.

Shekinah glory on my face, meeting with the Lord in the tent of meeting, up on the mountain for 80 days and 80 nights, me, I am under the hand of his judgment because I didn't hold God holy in your presence.

So if that's the standard for me, surely it's the standard for everyone else. And he lifts himself up and says, be careful, be careful.

The God who's let you see amazing things, the God who has declared his word to you, the God who has led you to worship different than anyone else is also the God that will hold you accountable.

[ 32 : 53 ] because he has done these things, because he has provided these opportunities, he is also the God who you will stand before based upon this.

Because, as scripture says, to them who has had much entrusted, much will be expected. people cry, I want to see God move, I want to hear his word, I want to know his word, I want to know God is in this place.

If we desperately, honestly want that entrusted to us, then we better be ready for the expectation that comes with that. Because God doesn't manifest and declare his word and accept our worship just because.

he's doing it to set us apart, to draw people to himself. This is what he's doing. The warning that they heeded is God is a consuming fire.

It just literally means it started with a manifestation of fire, it ends with this manifestation of fire. God will not let anything else take his place.

[ 34 : 09 ] And if it does, he'll burn it up. burn it up. Each and every time. Deuteronomy 4 verses 11 through 24, that which set them apart as the people of God.

Thank you. I hope so so!

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.