

BIBLE BRIEFING

***“Keep the Main Thing,
the Main Thing!”***

DEUTERONOMY 4 - 5

Introduction

When I was a businessman, the slogan for success was, *Plan your work, and work your plan.*

Sayings or slogans can be helpful in keeping you on track. If we wanted to assign a slogan to the next chapters of Deuteronomy, it might be, *Keep the main thing, the main thing!*

Moses was giving a series of sermons to prepare Generation W (Wilderness) to enter the Promised Land. Their success would depend upon keeping their relationship with God the main thing.

If you are going to keep God the main thing, there are three things Moses recommends: You first need to **hear** Him; you next need to **fear** Him; and you then need to **follow** Him. We see these in verse one of Chapter Four:

Deuteronomy 4:1 “Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you.

Listen – hear; **observe** – follow; **that you may live** – fear.

We begin, in Chapter Four, with **hearing** God. The verb *to hear* is used nearly 100 times in the Book of Deuteronomy. The traditional Jewish confession of faith (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) is called “The Shema,” from the Hebrew word which means *to hear, to pay attention, to understand, to obey*. It’s what Jesus meant when He said, “**Who has ears to hear, let him hear!**” That statement is found at least eight times in the Gospels; and it dominates the opening chapters of the Revelation.

Deuteronomy 4:1 “Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you.

Deuteronomy 4:2 You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.

Heed the warning to **not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it...** There is too much fuzzy math going on today as believers add and subtract from God’s Word!

Hear; then, **fear!** Most of the rest of the chapter involves walking in the fear of the Lord. To fear the Lord means to respect who He is, what He is, and what He says, and by our submission and obedience show Him that we love Him and want to please Him.

Moses gives some historical examples to show the benefits and blessings of fearing God.

Deuteronomy 4:3 Your eyes have seen what the Lord did at Baal Peor; for the Lord your God has destroyed from among you all the men who followed Baal of Peor.

Deuteronomy 4:4 But you who held fast to the Lord your God *are* alive today, every one of you.

The false prophet Baalam had been hired by King Balak to curse the people of Israel, but each time Baalam tried to curse the Jews, he ended up blessing them. His curses didn’t work but he had a plan that did work. He and Balak invited the Jewish men to attend one of the Moabite religious feasts and encouraged them to participate to the full. This meant having intercourse with the temple prostitutes, and one man even brought his “date” back into the Jewish camp! The fact that God judged His people by killing 24,000 men indicates that many of the Jews eagerly participated in the wicked feast. What the enemy couldn’t accomplish with curses and fighting he accomplished with compromise and “friendship.”

We’re told in Scripture that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Moses spoke about the wisdom that accompanies a healthy fear of God.

Deuteronomy 4:5 “Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to *them* in the land which you go to possess.

Deuteronomy 4:6 Therefore be careful to observe *them*; for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.’

Deuteronomy 4:7 “For what great nation *is there* that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God *is* to us, for whatever *reason* we may call upon Him?

Deuteronomy 4:8 And what great nation *is there* that has *such* statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?

Deuteronomy 4:9 Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren,

Wisdom has been defined as the correct application of knowledge. God tells you what you need to know; He tells you everything that pertains to life and godliness.

The example Moses gave was your home. You should apply God’s wisdom in your home. Think about the issues we face today, such as the movement toward recognizing same-sex marriages. We must instead apply God’s wisdom, or the family will fall, and with it, our society.

Moses gives the adults three suggestions:

1. Be examples to your children.
2. Don’t let God’s Word slip from your minds and hearts.
3. Remember what the Lord has done for you in the past and share these experiences with your children.

Moses recalls the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. Look at verses ten through twelve:

Deuteronomy 4:10 *especially concerning* the day you stood before the Lord your God in Horeb, when the Lord said to me, ‘Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and *that* they may teach their children.’

Deuteronomy 4:11 “Then you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the midst of heaven, with darkness, cloud, and thick darkness.

Deuteronomy 4:12 And the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; *you* only *heard* a voice.

We're still talking about fear, about learning to fear the Lord.

Deuteronomy 4:13 So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.

Deuteronomy 4:14 And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might observe them in the land which you cross over to possess.

Deuteronomy 4:15 "Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire,

Deuteronomy 4:16 lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female,

Deuteronomy 4:17 the likeness of any animal that *is* on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air,

Deuteronomy 4:18 the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that *is* in the water beneath the earth.

Deuteronomy 4:19 And *take heed*, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and *when* you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the Lord your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage.

If idolatry is present, fear is absent. They cannot co-exist. The fear of the Lord will prevent idolatry.

In verse twenty, Moses told them to remember their deliverance from Egypt.

Deuteronomy 4:20 But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be His people, an inheritance, as you are this day.

They should fear a return to Egypt. So should we! Whatever your testimony, you were redeemed out of slavery to Egypt.

We're called to be a separated people who are not conformed to this world, and yet the trend today is for churches to pattern ministry after what the world is doing. The philosophy is that the church will attract more people if the lost feel more comfortable with the services. The tragedy is that the sanctuary becomes a theater and "ministry" becomes entertainment. But Scripture and church history make it clear that what G. Campbell Morgan said is true: "The church did the most for the world when the church was the least like the world."

In verses twenty-one through twenty-four, Moses recounts his own experience at Kadesh.

Deuteronomy 4:21 Furthermore the Lord was angry with me for your sakes, and swore that I would not cross over the Jordan, and that I would not enter the good land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.

Deuteronomy 4:22 But I must die in this land, I must not cross over the Jordan; but you shall cross over and possess that good land.

Deuteronomy 4:23 Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the Lord your God has forbidden you.

Deuteronomy 4:24 For the Lord your God *is* a consuming fire, a jealous God.

The experiences of others can help teach us fear. We certainly do not want to be guilty of striking the Rock!

Discipline is a part of a healthy fear:

Deuteronomy 4:25 “When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, and act corruptly and make a carved image in the form of anything, and do evil in the sight of the Lord your God to provoke Him to anger,

Deuteronomy 4:26 I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you will soon utterly perish from the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess; you will not prolong *your* days in it, but will be utterly destroyed.

Deuteronomy 4:27 And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you.

Deuteronomy 4:28 And there you will serve gods, the work of men’s hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell.

Deuteronomy 4:29 But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find *Him* if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Deuteronomy 4:30 When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the Lord your God and obey His voice

Deuteronomy 4:31 (for the Lord your God *is* a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.

Moses didn’t say “if you make carved images,” but “when.” God loved them so much that He promised to discipline them. A good, godly child always knows when they need to be spanked.

In verses thirty-two through forty-three, Moses emphasized God’s unconditional love that He showered upon Israel. He was, and is, worthy to be feared.

Then, in verses forty-one through forty-three, Moses reminded them of the Cities of Refuge God had established. Only three are mentioned, because they had not yet crossed the Jordan.

What's that doing here? Well, the Cities of Refuge remind you that the fear of God impacts whole societies for the good. Instead of allowing families to take matters into their own hands, fear God, follow His ways, and everyone will be better for it.

Which brings us to our next point in keeping the main thing, the main thing. Hear; fear; now, **follow**. Specifically, follow God's Law in the Ten Commandments.

Verses forty-four through forty-nine introduce Chapter Five:

Deuteronomy 4:44 Now this *is* the law which Moses set before the children of Israel.

Deuteronomy 4:45 These *are* the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which Moses spoke to the children of Israel after they came out of Egypt,

Deuteronomy 4:46 on this side of the Jordan, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, in the land of Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt at Heshbon, whom Moses and the children of Israel defeated after they came out of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 4:47 And they took possession of his land and the land of Og king of Bashan, two kings of the Amorites, who *were* on this side of the Jordan, toward the rising of the sun,

Deuteronomy 4:48 from Aroer, which *is* on the bank of the River Arnon, even to Mount Sion (that is, Hermon),

Deuteronomy 4:49 and all the plain on the east side of the Jordan as far as the Sea of the Arabah, below the slopes of Pisgah.

This is where they were when Moses set the law before them; and he does that in Chapter Five.

Deuteronomy 5:1 And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearing today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them.

Deuteronomy 5:2 The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb.

Deuteronomy 5:3 The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who *are* here today, all of us who *are* alive.

The sense of verse three is either that the Lord did not make this covenant **only** with our fathers; or, that, since their fathers are dead, it

is now for the new generation. It was first given forty years earlier, to the previous generation; but it was still binding upon Generation W.

Deuteronomy 5:4 The Lord talked with you face to face on the mountain from the midst of the fire.

Deuteronomy 5:5 I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord; for you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up the mountain. *He* said:

What He said was the Ten Commandments, restated here, in verses six through twenty-one.

Apart from the political controversies regarding posting the Ten commandments, we need to ask and answer the question, Is the Christian obligated to keep the Ten Commandments? Perhaps this quote, attributed to Augustine, will answer: “Love God and do as you like.” Love transforms the Ten Commandments into a liberty; we obey and keep them to the extent we are loving God.

We’ve looked at these before, so we can skim a little.

Deuteronomy 5:6 ‘I *am* the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Deuteronomy 5:7 ‘You shall have no other gods before Me.

God’s deliverance is a way of really understanding the first commandment. Think of what you’ve been delivered from, and you won’t want ever to return there.

Deuteronomy 5:8 ‘You shall not make for yourself a carved image - any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth;

Deuteronomy 5:9 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me,

Deuteronomy 5:10 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

We need to get it through our heads, and into our hearts, that jealousy can be a great thing. God is jealous over you. It’s not that He gets upset when you prefer something, or someone, above Him;

it's that He knows it is wrong for you, it is bad for you, it will harm and destroy you.

Deuteronomy 5:11 'You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold *him* guiltless who takes His name in vain.

Here we can talk about the reputation of God. Anytime you misrepresent God, you are taking His name in vain. Moses took God's name in vain, for example, when he struck the Rock the second time. We want always to strive to represent to folks the true nature and character of God.

Deuteronomy 5:12 'Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you.

Deuteronomy 5:13 Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

Deuteronomy 5:14 but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the Lord your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.

Deuteronomy 5:15 And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

This is always where we have the most trouble, both with others and within ourselves. Many groups demand you worship on Saturday; and, if you're honest, sometimes you have a nagging fear that maybe we should!

My answer: We do 'keep' the Sabbath; but we keep it in it's substance, not in its shadow. Setting aside one day per week to rest and worship God was a shadow. The substance is being saved by grace through faith, by which we enter into God's rest on a daily basis, and by which we worship Him moment-by-moment. Every day is the Sabbath!

Deuteronomy 5:16 'Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

The family, as defined by God Who created it, is fundamental. We should not tamper with it. We do so at our own extreme peril.

Deuteronomy 5:17 'You shall not murder.

Life is sacred... And that is why we must observe the death penalty. Whether or not capital punishment is a deterrent, it is how we recognize the sanctity of life. Abortion is murder. Euthanasia is murder.

Deuteronomy 5:18 'You shall not commit adultery.

If the family is fundamental, then faithfulness in marriage is the foundation for it.

Deuteronomy 5:19 'You shall not steal.

You have the right of ownership. But, behind this, is God's right of ownership. He owns you! Rather than just see this as prohibiting folks from stealing from us, we should see ourselves and ask whether or not we are robbing God.

Deuteronomy 5:20 'You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Paraphrase: Watch your tongue! Sure, it's about not perjuring; but it goes way beyond that. Let no corrupt communication proceed from your mouth – only what is good for edifying others.

Deuteronomy 5:21 'You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that *is* your neighbor's.'

The antidote for coveting is being content. God puts you in many circumstances so you can learn to be content.

Deuteronomy 5:22 "These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly, in the mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and He added no more. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me.

I like it when Moses said, **He added no more.** It was all God needed

to say. Everything else, all other law, was an interpretation and an expansion of these basic things.

Conclusion

The remaining verses of Chapter Five recount the reaction of the people to the giving of the law. Of note are God's comments, in verse twenty-nine:

Deuteronomy 5:29 Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!

Fear & follow are repeated. **Hear... Fear... Follow.** It's a simple plan, so **that it might be well** with us.