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Hear and Obey
4: 1-8

Hear and obey DIG: What two reasons does God give for the necessity of His Torah to the new nation? What do these reasons reveal about God's expectations for His people? Read Deuteronomy 23-28, 31:18-21, and Jeremiah 7:1-34. Remember that the First Temple was destroyed because of the practice of idolatry and breaking our side of the covenant. Does our covenant with YHVH end when we break it? What is the secret to Jewish success?

REFLECT: What motivates you to godly obedience? First John 5:3 says that God's "commandments are not burdensome." How do you experience God's commandments? What is wisdom? How is wisdom different from human intelligence? What is the source of wisdom? What are some benefits of knowing and obeying God's wisdom? Would an unbeliever's commentary on your life resemble what the nations say about Isra'el? Why or why not? How does this make you feel?

Moses commands Isra'el to hear and obey God's statutes and ordinances so that they will enjoy ADONAI's blessings, and the surrounding pagan nations would recognize the wisdom and greatness of Isra'el's Torah, and of Isra'el's God.

The Israelites were standing at the door of **the** Promised **Land**. **A Land** said to be

flowing with milk and honey. By this time, they understood that this **Land** was not going to be given to **them** on a silver platter. **They** had to fight **their** way in and **they** had to fight hard to keep **it**. However, **ADONAI** never promised **them**, and **He** doesn't promise us that life will be without struggles. But for the believers of every age, **God** is always with us.

Having concluded his words of rebuke and pointing out that their fathers, as well as himself, had forfeited their right of entering the Promised Land on account of their sins, Moses now turned to the people with the assurance that they were destined to take possession of the Land, on the condition that they remained faithful to God and His Torah.

Chapter 4 is in essence a miniature sermon on **the covenant** and **the Torah**, in which the "sermon" prepares the way for the presentation of **the Ten Words** (**to see link click Bk – The Ten Words**), and the other **statutes** (Hebrew: *hachukkim*, meaning *to write into law permanently*) and **ordinances** (Hebrew: *hammishpatim*, meaning *a judgment of the court*) that will begin in **Chapter 5**.[107] This chapter can also be considered a version of **the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-17)** in the TaNaKh. **Moshe** begins with **the belt of truth**, which represents **the Word of God**

And now (Hebrew: *veatah*), refers back to the previous narration (see **Bc – Do Not Forget**). It is preparatory to the appeal to **obey** here. It was as if **Moshe** was saying, "And now, in the light of **ADONAI's** acts of deliverance, you should **obey His** commandments" **(Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 10:12; Joshua 24:14)**.[108]

O Isra'el, hear (Hebrew: *shema,* occurs almost one hundred times in **Deuteronomy**) **to the statutes and ordinances,** representing **the Word of God**, **that I am teaching you to do, so that you may live. Hearing** and **obeying the Word of God** was **Isra'el's** very **life**. When **YHVH** speaks, **He sets before** us **life and death (30:15-20).** Not only was **Isra'el's** life dependent on **obedience** to **the Torah**, but so was **her** victory over the enemy. **Her obedience** would enable **her** to **go in and possess the Land that ADONAI the God of your fathers** was **giving her (4:1). God** gave **the Torah** to **Isra'el** through **Moses** to provide parameters for **Isra'el's** conduct, not to function as a museum piece.[109] How could **the LORD** go before **His people** and give **them** victory if **they** weren't following **Him obediently (1:30)**?

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, How Awesome **You** are! **You** are such a wonderful and loving **Father**! Forgive us for focusing on **Your** love and forgiveness and forgetting*

*the very painful price **You** paid for our redemption and rescue from sin's punishment. **(Second Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 7:27, 9:11-15).** We need to remember that just like for Isra'el, **You** go before us and give victory we need to be **obedient**. We worship **You** and rejoice in loving and following **You**. In **Your** holy **Son's** name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

Believers today must find their victory in life from **God's Word**. Unless we know what **ADONAI** commands, we can't **obey Him**. But if we know **His commandments**, believe **them**, and **obey them**, then **His** power goes to work in our lives. **And His commandments are not burdensome (First John 5:3). Obeying the LORD** becomes a joyful privilege when you realize that **His commandments** are expressions of **His** love, assurances of **His** strength, invitations to **His** blessing, opportunities to grow and bring **Him** glory, and occasions to enjoy **His** love and fellowship as we seek to please **Him**. **God's Word** is an open door into the treasury of **His** grace.[110]

Although the actual pronouncement of **the Torah** does not begin until the following chapters, the nature and purpose of **the Torah** are explained here, so that the **obedience** that is called for will not be blind **obedience**, but an **obedience** based on understanding. The emphasis is on **teaching the Torah** because **the Torah** is the basis of **the covenant**.[111]

Here **Moshe** links **Isra'el's** welfare and enjoyment of **the** Promised **Land** to **her obedience** to **the Word of God**. The duty of **obedience** and the gift of **the Land** were interdependent. Later in this same chapter, **he** elaborates on the same idea: **You must keep His statutes and His ordinances, which I am commanding you today, so that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and so that you may prolong your days in the Land that ADONAI your God is giving you for all time (4:40).** The idea that righteousness lengthens life and sin shortens it, is common in the TaNaKh **(Proverbs 3:1-2** and **16, 10:27)**.

How would **the Israelites** guard **the Word of God**? **The Ruach ha-Kodesh** had **Moshe** write: **You must not add to the word that I am commanding you or take away from it – in order to keep the statutes and ordinances of ADONAI your God that I am commanding you for it diminishes its divine purpose (4:2).** Tragically, **the Israelites** eventually elevated **the Oral Law** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ei – The Oral Law**) to a place equal, or even superior to, **the Torah**, even though **Moshe** had warned against that here. Almost every heresy and sect has originated in a supposed revelation or a new

experience on the part of its founder, something outside the teachings of the Bible. It is the elevation of experience over the authority of Scripture that grieves **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** most of all.

The changes and modification made to **the Word of God** have resulted in tragedy in the history of **Isra'el** and also in the history of the Church. A vivid illustration of the fact that disobedience to the commandments of **YHVH** brings destruction and death is now given. It all began in **the Garden of Eden**, where **Adam and Eve** fell because **they added** and **took away** from **the Word of God**. **The Serpent** began by putting a doubt in the mind of **Eve** when **he said to the woman, "Did God really** say: **You must not eat from any tree in the garden? You will not surely die (3:1b** and **4),** when **ADONAI** had clearly declared: **You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die (3:3).** This paved the way for the fall of all mankind, and the same mistake is at the root of **Isra'el's** suffering over the ages.

This was the same complaint of the prophets, who, like **Moshe**, linked **Isra'el's** ultimate punishment of being banished from **the Land** as a result of **her** disregard and modification of **the Word of God**. **Isaiah** said: **Therefore, My people are in captivity for lack of knowledge (Isaiah 5:13)**, and **Hosea** said it this way: **My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6).**

When **Yeshua** came to the earth, **He** also assessed the reason for **Isra'el's** afflicted state when **He** said: **You are making void the Word of God with your tradition that you've handed down (Mark 7:13).** How many times did **Messiah** warn Jewish religious leaders **not to add or take away** from **the Scriptures**? **Have you never read the Scriptures (Matthew 21:42)? Haven't you read what was spoken to you by God (Matthew 22:31)? Isn't this the reason you've gone astray because you don't understand the Scriptures (Mark 12:24)?** And today these words still apply. **Isra'el** needs to understand that **their** individual and national salvation is found in **God** and **His Word**. This tragedy extends to the Church as well. We see similar warnings in every epistle about keeping **the Word of God** and avoiding false teachers. This is why the B'rit Chadashah ends with **John's** stern warning: **I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues that are written in the book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his share in the Tree of Life and the Holy City, which are written in this book (Revelation 22:18-19).**

The cults add to **the words** of the Bible and the liberals take **them** away. The form of the warning comes from **Deuteronomy 4:2**, where **God** admonishes **Isra'el,** "**Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of ADONAI your God that I give you." The Israelites** were to worship **their God** in total and complete obedience. **His Word** is sufficient and complete. In **Deuteronomy 12:32 Moshe** added: **See** (Hebrew: *r'eh*) **that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it. Proverbs 30:5-6** warns: **Every word of God is flawless; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words, or He will rebuke you and prove you a liar.** Therefore, the prohibition against altering the words of **Revelation** by implication extends to the entire Bible (see the commentary on **Revelation Gd – If Anyone Adds to the Words of this Book, God Will Add to Them the Plagues Described**).[112]

Using an emotional illustration from **their** own history, **Moshe** refers to the incident **at Peor** when **their** very lives depended on total obedience to **God's Word**. **Your eyes have seen what ADONAI did at Peor, for ADONAI your God has destroyed from among you everyone who followed** the false **god Ba'al of Peor (4:3).** If **Isra'el's** rebellion at Kadesh Barnea represented the lowest point in **her** relationship with **YHVH**, **their** rebellion at **Ba'al Peor** was the freshest in **their** memory **(Numbers 25:1-9; Psalm 106:28; Hosea 9:10). Moses recalled the fact that all who followed the false god Ba'al at Peor had perished, and they who remained faithful to God were still alive. This testified to Moshe's teaching that obedience to God's commandments meant life.**

Balaam tried to put a curse on the Jews, but it didn't work (Numbers 23 and 24). So, **he** tried a different tactic. **He** found a weakness in **the men of Isra'el**. At **his** direction, **the women** of **Mo'ab** and **Midian** were sent out to entice **the Jewish men**, and **they** did not come alone. **They** brought **their gods** with **them**. Eventually **Balaam** prevailed and **his** plot worked. **The men of Isra'el** fell and **the** whole **nation** was cursed. This was an example of what happens when **the Word of God** is neglected. Idolatry infiltrated **Isra'el** and **24,000 died** because **of the plague** that **ADONAI** had sent against **them**.

The problem of **idolatry** has affected the Church as well. **Yeshua** addressed this when **He** said to **the church in Pergamum**: **Nevertheless, I have a few things against you. You have** some **people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality (2:14).** Like many

today, they had failed to heed to biblical warnings against worldliness. Consequently, it was flirting and in danger of falling in **love** with **the world**. This was a fitting warning because it was addressed to **the church in Pergamum** which represented the Church during the Age of Constantine (see the commentary on **Revelation Bb – The Church at Pergamum**). **Pergamum** literally means *thoroughly married*, and as the body of **Messiah** became *thoroughly married* to the Roman Empire. **The wheat**, in effect, *married* **the weeds** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ev – The Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds**). As the idol worship gained acceptance in the Church, it declined in spiritual blessing and power. In reality, like **the Jews at Ba'al Peor**, the church at **Pergamum** began to commit spiritual adultery.[113]

At Peor, t**he Jewish men** who refused the invitation to idolatry and remained true to **the LORD** were still **alive**. **But you who held tight to ADONAI your God are alive today – all of you (4:4).** It is the same for us today. **The Word of God** is our lifeline, and **obeying God's Word** keeps us in fellowship with **Him (Second Corinthians 6:14-7:1)**. **God's people** must be careful not to become too friendly with **the world (James 4:4)**, because this leads to **loving the world (First John 2:15-17)**, and being conformed to **the world (Romans 12:2)**. This kind of lifestyle invites the discipline of **YHVH** (see the commentary on **Hebrews Ci – If We Deliberately Keep On Sinning, No Sacrifice For Sins is Left**).

More and more people are asking in the world, "What is the secret of **the Jews**? Why and how do **they** succeed?" We try to analyze all the reasons for our knowledge, such as our education, languages, mathematics, money management, music, and a thousand different studies that try to put our finger on the best-kept secret as **Jews**. **The Torah** cracks open this secret and reveals it to everyone: **See, just as ADONAI my God commanded me, I have taught** (Hebrew: *limmadti*, a perfect verb *indicating past actions that are seen as now completed*) **you statutes and ordinances to do in the Land that you are about to enter to possess. You must keep and do them, for it is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the peoples, who will hear all these statutes** and say: **Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people (4:5-6).**

The secret of **wisdom** is in **the Word of God**. **How blessed are those who reject the advice of the wicked, don't stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers! Their delight is on ADONAI's Torah; on His Torah they meditate night and day. They are like trees planted by streams of water, they bear fruit in season, their leaves never wither, everything they do**

succeeds (Psalm 1:1-3). The secred of wisdom is God's Word. In knowing **God's word**, **the people** of **Isra'el** would not only succeed in **their** mission but **they** would also be witnesses to the other pagan nations around **them**, who placed great value on **wisdom**. And we need to know and **obey His wisdom** if our lives are to please and glorify **Him**. **For the world's wisdom is foolishness in the sight of God (First Corinthians 3:19),** and those who follow it will be disappointed. In the TaNaKh, the word **wisdom** has to do with character rather than human intelligence and describes the ethical use of knowledge.[114]

Finally, the distinctiveness in **Isra'el's** relationship with **ADONAI** is made clear. **The covenant** would distinguish **Isra'el** from **her** neighbors. Unlike their distant relationship with remote and inaccessible **gods**, **Isra'el's** loving relationship with **YHVH** would amaze the Gentile nations. **Isra'el would be respected by the peoples of the world if they would obey and practice the Torah, with a full understanding. For what great nation is there that has gods so near to them, as ADONAI our God is whenever we call on Him? What great nation is there that has statutes and ordinances that are righteous – like all of this Torah that I am setting before you today (4:7-8)? Ha'Shem's Torah** would exceed everything that **the goyim** had ever **heard**. And as those **nations** were amazed at **Isra'el's** greatness, **they** would also be amazed at **Isra'el's God**.[115]