

## THE SABBATH COMMANDMENTS IN EXODUS 20 AND DEUTERONOMY 5: COMPARATIVE STUDY

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### Abstract

*One of the fundamental ideas that guided the establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist Church movement was the Sabbath doctrine. In Exodus 20, the Israelites were explicitly given the mandate to observe the Sabbath holy, as a day of rest to honor the completion of creation by God. Verse 11 lists the reasons for keeping the Sabbath holy and commemorated, which are consistent with Genesis 2:2. Nevertheless, Deuteronomy 5 also has a comparable command. The Sabbath was instituted to remind people of their salvation and to allow them to reflect on their deliverance from slavery while they rested in the goodness of their God. Exodus 20:11 and Deuteronomy 5:15 complement each other when it comes to the reasons why the Sabbath should be kept, despite their discrepancies. The way the Ten Commandments are rephrased in Deuteronomy adds to the significance of the Sabbath. Consequently, rather than contradicting one another, these two passages reinforce one another.*

**Keywords:** *Sabbath, salvation, slavery, commandments, Exodus, Deuteronomy*

### Background

The Sabbath doctrine is one of the pillars in the formation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church movement. The understanding of the Sabbath doctrine is a differentiator between the Adventist Church and other Christian churches and gives the Adventist Church a distinctive identity.<sup>1</sup> Even some pioneers of the Adventist Church like Joseph Bates argued that the Sabbath law is the most important law in the end times before the second coming of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> So as a whole, this doctrine concerns the identity and basic understanding of the Adventist Church. However, focusing on a complete knowledge of this doctrine is critical.

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<sup>1</sup> George R. Knight, *A Search of Identity* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1999), 74.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Bates, *The Seventh Day Sabbath, A Perpetual Sign* (New Bedford: Press of Benjamin Lindsey, 1847), 98.

The Hebrews Bible portrays it as the driving force behind all history that the Sabbath of God is to change into the Sabbath of the creature in Gen. 2:2.<sup>3</sup> Yet, the command to keep the Sabbath holy was formally given to the Israelites in Exodus chapter 20. As a rest day to commemorate the completion of God's creation.<sup>4</sup> The reason why the Sabbath must be remembered and kept holy is listed in verse 11 which also goes hand in hand with what is in Genesis 2:2. However, a similar command is also found in Deuteronomy chapter 5. The purpose of the Sabbath was to serve as a reminder of salvation so that the people would remember their freedom from slavery while they rested in the goodness of their God.<sup>5</sup> The reason why the Sabbath must be remembered and sanctified is stated in verse 15 as a reference for the generation of the Israelites who will soon enter the land of Canaan.

These two commands look the same but have significant differences. The significant difference comes from the reasons why the Israelites had to keep the Sabbath holy. Exodus 20 attributes the Sabbath to Creation, but Deuteronomy 5 attributes the Sabbath to freedom from slavery. Therefore, Deuteronomy emphasizes freedom from Egypt and hence redemption, while Exodus emphasizes creation. In other words, the two texts have different reasons, so there is a need for a comparative explanation between these two verses to contain the correct theological side of the Sabbath doctrine. In addition, it is hoped that this comparative study can rectify heretical teachings related to the Sabbath doctrine.

By looking at the different reasons for the Sabbath law being given to the Israelites, three main questions arise in this study, which are; (1) In light of the differences, how are these two texts explained? (2) Do these two texts contradict each other or are they related? And lastly (3) What does this mean for today as regards keeping the Sabbath?

The methodology to be used in writing this paper is based on a comparative study. In addition, the different reasons why the Sabbath must be remembered and kept holy are the main objects in this paper. Furthermore, with the existing comparison, it can contribute to a better understanding of the Sabbath doctrine. Thus, these two texts will be compared and it is hoped that there will be theological implications that can be drawn as a conclusion. The next chapter will discuss about the background of the text, the comparison, and finally, the theological implication that will serve as our conclusion.

### **Background of The Text**

In connection with the two texts which have the same commandments but are found in different books, a background analysis is needed for each of these texts. What happened in Exodus can be a major key to why the reason for the fourth commandment exists, and so it is in

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<sup>3</sup> C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume 1* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 25.

<sup>4</sup> Gleason Archer Jr, *A survey of Old Testament introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press. 1994), 282.

<sup>5</sup> Philip G. Ryken & R. K. Hughes, *Exodus: saved for God's glory* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 441.

Deuteronomy. On the other hand, the author of these two texts is still Moses but it is certain that the condition of the Israelites in Exodus is not the same as in Deuteronomy.

The book might have been finished as early as 1444 B.C., two years after the Exodus because it could not have been written after 1406 B.C., the year Moses died.<sup>6</sup> The Book of Deuteronomy must have developed at the same time when the desert age, which lasted from 1407 to 1406, came to an end.<sup>7</sup> With the information indicating the year the two books were written, it is certain that the direct audience at that time was different. In other words, the generations of the Israelites in Exodus are different from those in Deuteronomy, so the rewriting of the law was important. However, it is necessary to know more about the specific background of these two texts in order to see the essence of the two rewritten laws. To comprehend such texts, one must have a basic awareness of Near Eastern culture.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, in this chapter, these two texts will be looked at in terms of their respective backgrounds.

### **Exodus 20:8-11**

The introduction to Exodus 20 shows how the Israelites had just come out of the land of Egypt. God communicates the words of the covenant to Moses and Aaron as they ascend the mount after Moses has warned the populace. These instructions are formally delivered to a people at Sinai when they establish a new covenant with God.<sup>9</sup>

The term "remember" at the beginning of Exodus 20:8–11 indicates that the Israelites already obeyed this command; in this case, this is evident from the narrative in Exodus 16. It is interesting that this legislation is founded on a creation account, a type of creation narrative that is comparable to the sacerdotal version of Genesis 1, which is regarded to have exilic origins.<sup>10</sup> The preposition for, which means "because," presents the justification for this commandment. The Lord created heaven and earth, which is literally "Yahweh created the heavens and the earth."<sup>11</sup> Thus, God gave this law to Israel so that they would not forget the almighty God who made the heavens, the earth, and everything in them. The emphasis on God as the ruler of the universe is implied in this fourth law.

The emphasis on God's omnipotence as creator is rooted in the fact that the Israelites who came out of Egypt were mixed with the Egyptians. Since many non-Israelites had become

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Dyer, Eugene Merrill, Charles R. Swindoll, and Roy B. Zuck, *Nelson's Old Testament Survey: Discover the Background, Theology, and Meaning of Every Book in the Old Testament*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publisher 2001), 45.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>8</sup> Frank M. Hasel. *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Adventist Approach*. (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, 2020), 471.

<sup>9</sup> Roy Gingrich, *The Book of Exodus* (Memphis, TN.: Riverside Printing. 2001), 34.

<sup>10</sup> George V. Pixley, *On Exodus: A Liberation Perspective* (New York: Orbis Books, 1987), 135.

<sup>11</sup> Noel D. Osborn & Howard Hatton, *A handbook on Exodus* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1999), 478.

Israelites, other societies undoubtedly seized the chance to choose independence.<sup>12</sup> Another reason is the custom of the Israelites who began to follow the life of the Egyptians. Exodus 12:40 gives information that they were in the Egyptian sphere of influence for 430 years. Thus, they have the potential to always remember what was in Egypt like what happened in Exodus 16 when they complained about the food and wanted to go back to Egypt. They preferred their slavery in Egypt to their current situation in the desert since they could not have been in a position of complete destitution since they had brought a large number of livestock and herds with them when they left Egypt.<sup>13</sup> The influence of the Egyptians was strong on the lives of the Israelites so there was a need to reaffirm that the God of their ancestors was the God who reigned in their lives.

Thus, this is the background of the Israelites who had just left the Land of Egypt. Many have been mixed up with the Egyptians, there are nations other than Israel who have also left, and their lives have been influenced by Egyptian culture. These are the important points why in the fourth Commandment, their reason for quitting all work and keeping the Sabbath day holy is so that they can remember God as the creator, ruling over every life that exists, is the true God. Whether Israelites or not, if they were in that community, they had to keep the Sabbath day holy. As a result, it is depicted as a rested day that is beneficial to everyone and serves to refocus attention on holiness.<sup>14</sup>

### **Deuteronomy 5:12-15**

Deuteronomy 5 is part of Moses' advice given to the Israelites before they entered Canaan. In General, the book of Deuteronomy is a narrative approach. The narrative use of a story demonstrates how biblical concepts apply to practical circumstances.<sup>15</sup> This aspect can be seen in the first passage of the book begins, "These are the words which Moses spoke," a claim that Moses is responsible for the whole book as well as the following paragraph.<sup>16</sup>

This passage refers to the Departure from Egypt as the predecessor of the Sabbath.<sup>17</sup> The Sabbath is seen as a recurring commemoration of Israel's escape from Egypt and of its

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<sup>12</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus: Interpretation, A Bible Commentary and for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 143.

<sup>13</sup> Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary: Exodus* (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1999). electronic ed., Ex 16:3.

<sup>14</sup> Douglas K. Stuart, *The New American Commentary: Exodus vol. 2* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 460.

<sup>15</sup> Frank Hasel, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Adventist Approach* (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, 2020), 172.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Dyer, Eugene Merrill, Charles R. Swindoll, and Roy B. Zuck, *Nelson's Old Testament Survey: Discover the Background, Theology, and Meaning of Every Book in the Old Testament* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publisher 2001), 123.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), 157.

relationship to Jehovah in this culture.<sup>18</sup> This is one of the differences between the ten commandments in Exodus 20, which is the fourth commandment.

Socially and spiritually, the Israelites who were the first listeners of these texts were the majority of people who were born, grew, and developed in the wilderness. Given that they had been out of Egypt for forty years, the Israelites at that time underwent a generational shift from the first to the second. The process of covenant reiteration and reaffirmation, which is consistent with the covenant connections testified to across the ancient Near Eastern civilization, was necessary for the next generation, which was ready to begin a conquest.<sup>19</sup> The law given to Moses must be introduced and reiterated for the new generation to fully preserve their relationship with God. With the passing of the generations, a covenant struck between a great monarch and a vassal people must be repeated by his and their descendants.<sup>20</sup> Each Israelite should uphold the proper covenant with God by living a blameless life in order to be prepared to enter the land of Canaan.

The Israelites' nation was to show itself to be the holy nation of Jehovah<sup>21</sup>. Israelis who are used to living as nomads in the desert find it challenging because they want to explore a new area that is being occupied at the moment. To adapt properly to them, cultural modifications must be taken into account. Furthermore, some studies mentioned that Egypt and Canaan shared a border, and it is well known that Egypt had a significant impact on the Levant, particularly during the Late Bronze Age.<sup>22</sup> Through this, it can be proven that the social influence from Canaan can have a bad impact on the Israelites, as happened with the social impact from Egypt on Israel because Canaan and Egypt are not very different and have a life of idol worship. So, the emphasis on their leaving Egypt in the fourth commandment is a reminder for them to remain in the right relationship with the same God who led them out of Egypt. Given that many of them did not feel the moment Israel left Egypt.

### Comparison Between Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15

After tracing the background of these texts, the next step is to draw out the comparisons in this text. A comparison of the two texts can be seen in the table below:

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<sup>18</sup> S.R. Driver, *A critical and exegetical commentary on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902). 3rd ed., Vol. 3, pp. 85–86.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Dyer, Eugene Merrill, Charles R. Swindoll, and Roy B. Zuck, *Nelson's Old Testament Survey: Discover the Background, Theology, and Meaning of Every Book in the Old Testament* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publisher 2001), 126.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Arno Gaebelein, *The Annotated Bible: Genesis to Deuteronomy* (Bellingham: Logos Research Systems, Inc, 2009), Vol. 1, p. 412.

<sup>22</sup> William Hallo, *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions, Monumental Inscriptions, and Archival Documents from the Biblical World*. (Boston: Brill Leiden, 2003), 1113.

| <b>Exodus 20:8-11 (NASB)</b>   | <b>Deuteronomy 5:12-15 (NASB)</b>  |
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| Verse 8: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy   | Verse 12: Keep the Sabbath day to treat it as holy, as the Lord your God commanded you   |
| Verse 9: For six days you shall labor and do all your work,  | Verse 13: For six days you shall labor and do all your work,   |
| Verse 10: but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God; on it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male slave or your female slave, or your cattle, or your resident who stays with you. | Verse 14: but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God; you shall not do any work that day, you or your son or your daughter, or your male slave or your female slave, or your ox, your donkey, or any of your cattle, or your resident who stays with you, so that your male slave and your female slave may rest as well as you |
| Verse 11: For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and everything that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; for that reason, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.                 | Verse 15: And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to celebrate the Sabbath day.  |

From this comparison, it will be seen that there are some differences from the introduction in verses 8 and 11, but these differences have been explained in the previous chapter. Verses 9 and 12 have the same structure which explains the six days humans must work but on the seventh day, they must stop. Likewise, verses 10 and 14 explain the same thing: everyone in the community must stop on the seventh day. However, in verses 11 and 15 there are differences regarding the reasons why the Seventh Day must be kept holy. However, in terms of background, the verses in the previous chapter have provided several explanations.

However, in verse 15 of Deuteronomy 5, there is the addition "therefore the Lord your God commanded you to celebrate the Sabbath day" which is not in Exodus 20:11. In addition to reciting the Ten Commandments, Moses also made a number of apparent comments on them; nevertheless, these remarks are insignificant and do not affect the significance or validity of God's rule.<sup>23</sup> It emphasizes the Decalogue's divine authorship.<sup>24</sup> This is the reason for the addition in Deuteronomy 5.

### **Theological Implications**

Some theologians have a unique view of these two texts. Among them is Walter Elwer, an evangelical theologian, who argues that both the creation model and the creation ordinance

<sup>23</sup> Gerhard Pfandl, *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers* (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), 171.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

remain in effect.<sup>25</sup> Even though the reason for creation is not stated in the book of Deuteronomy 5, the idea of God as the creator is still implied in the fourth commandment. Other theologians, such as Charles Pfeiffer, argue that it was most fitting that God chose the Sabbath as a symbol of his covenant with the people he freed from slavery in Egypt so that they may inherit the remainder of Canaan.<sup>26</sup> According to Charles, the best way to understand the reasons for this law is to look at it from the context where the Israelites will soon enter Canaan and rest there, so the Sabbath day becomes an image that they will not work again like what happened to them in Egypt.

Seventh-day Adventist Church commentary provides a different view where The Israelites' freedom from Egypt provided even another cause to honor the Sabbath, but the very wording of the fourth commandment itself refers to the Sabbath's creation-era beginnings.<sup>27</sup> Although there are differences in the main reasons why the Sabbath should be observed, the basics in Deuteronomy 5 are rooted in creation as in Exodus 20:11. This is also supported by Ellen G. White. She mentioned that in Eden, where God had just placed man on Earth, the Sabbath of the fourth commandment was established.<sup>28</sup>

Through the existing review, the two reasons in Exodus 20:11 and Deuteronomy 5:15 are closely related to one another. Regardless of the context in which these texts are written, theologically the Sabbath is held for humans to remember creation and deliverance from worldly slavery. Like what is in the Scriptures, Exodus 31:12-17, where the Sabbath is a sign between Israel and God. Leviticus 19:3 also emphasizes that the God who gave the Sabbath day is a God full of power. Even Jesus, when he was on earth, he kept the Sabbath (Luke 4:16). And even in the days of the apostles they still observed the seventh day as the Sabbath (Acts 13:42). Through the emphasis on the Sabbath in the Scriptures, the seventh day is the Sabbath that God gave to mankind in the celebration of creation and also in the celebration of liberation from worldly work. Therefore, the Sabbath commandment speaks of both creation and salvation.

## Conclusions

As the conclusion of this paper, it will focus on answering the questions in chapter one. In light of the differences, Exodus 20:11 and Deuteronomy 5:15 complement one another regarding the reasons the Sabbath should be observed. The significance of the Sabbath is increased by Deuteronomy's unique phrasing of the Ten Commandments. Therefore, these two

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<sup>25</sup> Walter Elwell, *Evangelical commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1996). Vol. 3, Dt 5:6.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Pfeiffer, *The Wycliffe Bible commentary: Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), Dt 5:2.

<sup>27</sup> Nichol, F. D. (Ed.). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol 1 (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978), 972.

<sup>28</sup> Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts* (Washington: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1858), Vol. 3, p. 295.

texts do not contradict each other but support each other. Regardless of the background of these two texts, the theological implications of these two texts really help Bible readers to understand the meaning of the Sabbath.

In addition, as a Seventh-day Adventist member who lives today, it can assist in properly observing and observing the Sabbath. Exodus 20's instruction to keep the Sabbath holy and to rest on the specified seventh day, the Sabbath, after six days of work is in line with the Sabbath law contained in Deuteronomy. As a result, the Sabbath commandment also refers to salvation in addition to Creation. We observe the Sabbath because God created and preserved us. So, the Sabbath is very important not only because of the creation event but also because of the redemption that God has done for everyone.



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