

# GENERAL SCIENCE NOTES

## THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS, THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT AND DEUTERONOMY 5

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Exodus 20:11 refers to the six-day creation as the reason for remembering to keep the Sabbath-day holy. This is reiterated in Exodus 31 where the fourth commandment is restated in verses 13-17. In both cases, the entire fourth commandment, including the reference to the six-day creation is attributed to God who is said to have both spoken the words and then written them on tables of stone.

Whether or not one believes God actually wrote that He created in six days, it seems reasonable to say that the author of Exodus clearly wished readers to understand that the Sabbath is inextricably connected with the six-day creation. However, a third version of the fourth commandment exists in Deuteronomy 5:12-15. In this version, the salvation God wrought in bringing Israel out of slavery in Egypt is mentioned in place of the creation as a reason for keeping the Sabbath, or at least for letting one's slaves rest on the Sabbath. It may be argued, based on this difference between the texts, that the original command to keep the Sabbath was not linked to the creation or the Exodus, but that these reasons for keeping the Sabbath holy were inserted into the text by uninspired authors or editors and that the reference to the six-day creation is thus not what God spoke or wrote.

An ancient Dead Sea scroll which is part of an exhibition currently at the San Diego (California, USA) Natural History Museum may shed some light on this situation. In this manuscript, 4Q41, the fourth commandment is given in an expanded form that includes Moses' comment linking the Sabbath to redemption from slavery in Egypt while also including the original reference to the creation given in Exodus 20 and 31. An English translation of 4Q41 is given in the exhibition catalog. Starting at Column III Line 9 which corresponds to Deuteronomy 5:12, it reads:<sup>1</sup>

### ***Column III***

9 *Deut 5:12* *Observe //// the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as  
the LORD your God has commanded you.*

10 *Deut 5:13* *Six days you shall labor and do all your work,*

- 11 *Deut 5:14* But on\* the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD  
your God; you shall not do any work on it\*
- 12 you, † your son, † your daughter, † your male or female  
slave, † your ox or your ass,

#### **Column IV**

- 1 or\*\*\*\* your cattle, † the stranger in your settlements,  
//// so that your male and females slave may rest
- 2 As you do. *Deut 5:15* Remember that you were a slave //// in  
the land of Egypt and
- 3 the LORD our God freed you from there with a mighty  
hand //// and an outstretched arm;
- 4 therefore the LORD your God has commanded you ////  
to keep\*\*\*\*\* the Sabbath day
- 5 to consecrate it.\* *Ex 21:11* For in six days the LORD made  
heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but  
rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed  
the Sabbath day and consecrated it. //// *Deut 5:16* Honor  
your father and your mother, as . . .

\* Not in the Masoretic Text (MT)

† The MT has “and”

\*\*\*\* The MT reads “any of”

\*\*\*\*\* The MT reads “to observe”

//// Indicates where text is broken or illegible

Strawn<sup>2</sup> (and others) attribute this and other “expansions” of the Masoretic text in 4Q41 to an attempt to harmonize Deuteronomy with the rest of the Pentateuch, noting a similar pattern in the Samaritan Pentateuch (although it does not include Exodus 20:11 in Deuteronomy 5). Whatever was intended, the ancient version of Deuteronomy 5 recorded in 4Q41 clearly shows that at the time it was transcribed, between 30 BC and 1 BC, there were people who believed the truncated version of the Fourth Commandment spoken by Moses in Deuteronomy 5 – with his reminder that the Israelites were once slaves and thus should give their slaves Sabbath rest – did not invalidate the more complete versions spoken and written by God and recorded in Exodus 20 and 31.

The fact that examples are unknown of Exodus 20 being “harmonized” by insertion of the comments about slavery in Egypt from Deuteronomy 5 may indicate that the Exodus renditions of the Fourth Commandment were considered to be the authoritative versions they appear to be in the Masoretic text. In addition, given that 4Q41 is among the most ancient copies of Deuteronomy, it may call into question the theory that the six-

days in the Fourth Commandment were inserted by an editor who lived after Moses. The 4Q41 example shows that when such harmonization was done in ancient times, the inserted text was copied verbatim from an already existing text in the Pentateuch, not made up by an editor seeking to add in information or a summary reference to another part of the Pentateuch. Second, if more ancient manuscripts are considered to be more definitive, then it could be argued that the six-day creation was edited out of the Deuteronomy 5 Fourth Commandment rather than edited into Exodus 20 and 31. In either case, arguments against the Divine Hand inscribing the claim that God created in six literal days appear to be substantially weakened by the existence of 4Q41.

### ENDNOTES

1. Kohn RL. 2007. *Dead Sea Scrolls*. San Diego, CA: San Diego University Press, p 19.
2. Strawn BA. 2006. Excerpted manuscripts at Qumran: their significance for textual history of the Hebrew Bible and the socio-religious history of the Qumran community and its literature. In: Charlesworth JH, editor. *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, p 119.