



## Chapter 5

### There Remains a Sabbath Rest

One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind.  
—Ecclesiastes 4:6

In the previous chapters, we’ve unpacked much about how God interacts with rest. We’ve seen what rest was in the beginning, considered the use of reminders after the exile, and examined how Jesus presented himself as the fulfillment of the idea during His earthly ministry. To revisit the “neighborhood” analogy from earlier, we’ve ventured into the complex system of streets in the neighborhood of rest without getting stuck at the bottom of the bag. But we are not done exploring the neighborhood. We still need to ask possibly the most practical questions of the entire journey:

So what?

We know what biblical rest is—so what now?

It’s in the “so what” question that we will unpack how biblical rest is supposed to make sense in our day-to-day lives. We will think through how believers can interact with this topic. We will locate specific examples of how to enter that rest, and how to remain there.

It’s in Hebrews that the application will become much more practical. We will see how the ministry of Jesus is compared and contrasted with the shadow ministry of the Old Testament Law. In its case for Jesus, Hebrews continually finds the Law lacking in its ability to fix what is

wrong, and presents Jesus as fully sufficient in those regards. It's also in Hebrews (chapters 3 and 4) that we find the most in-depth discussion on the topic of rest in the entirety of the New Testament. It is there that many of the practical "so what?" questions of rest are answered.

To better understand that discussion in Hebrews 3–4, let's begin by venturing down a side street of the neighborhood and look at a conclusion that the author of Hebrews makes regarding the Law in Hebrews 10. We've previously looked at the first verse of that chapter, which speaks of the Law as a shadow ministry. But that first verse is just a small part of a much bigger discussion (Hebrews 10:1–14) in which the sacrificial system is contrasted with Jesus. Let's look at that first verse again:

For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. (Hebrews 10:1)

Sometimes people get thrown off when it says "perfect" at the end. What does it even mean for a person to be "made perfect"? How would someone even track that? The Greek word behind the translation can also carry the sense of completeness, fulfillment, or maybe best in this context, maturity. It has a much deeper meaning than our English translations can easily convey. I like the idea that as something matures, it approaches the fulfillment or completeness of what it is supposed to be. This is very good news as we all grow older. Those around me have been waiting for so long for my maturity to take root!

This passage suggests the Old Testament sacrifices, the shadows, are incapable of bringing people to maturity. It says there is no way the shadows can bring someone to their fulfillment or the completeness of what they are supposed to be. The logic backing this statement is found in the next two verses.

Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins year by year. (Hebrews 10:2–3)

This is the reason these sacrifices are incapable of getting humanity to the finish line, the ultimate goal of completeness and maturity. It's the repetition of their application that proves their overall inefficiency. It's a red flag to let us know that they were incapable of bringing people to the end goal.

It's in these repetitive sacrifices that there is a reminder of sins, year by year. Did you hear that? The way that is worded should have grabbed your attention. We've spent a significant amount of time discussing the idea of the Law containing reminders. That's one of the main purposes of the Law: to remind people that there is a God who created this whole thing and that He has a plan to fix it. The Old Testament sacrifices were a reminder of that, but it wasn't only the sacrifices. The whole Law was a comprehensive, well-coordinated, interconnected system of reminders.

What was the end goal of the Old Testament Law? The goal was for Israel to live in a relationship with God, where they were in their place and doing the thing they were created to do without sin or a lack of faith, hindering God's kingdom work. That was the goal, but Hebrews argues that the Law was incapable of accomplishing that goal. Humanity needed something better that could complete the task.

It is the new covenant of Jesus' ministry that fully unshackles humanity. This unhindered existence will be fully realized at the end of the story (Revelation 21–22). But the author of Hebrews talks about the ministry of Jesus being available to humanity now, not just at some point in the seemingly far-distant future. That's an important distinction that many people

overlook in the argument. The realization of our “maturity” is not just an end goal to which we can only look forward. Through the ministry of Jesus, humanity is able to begin the maturation process now.

So, in contrast to the continual and repetitive sacrifices that were only shadows of something better to come, the body of Jesus was offered one time for all people and all time (Hebrews 10:10). Jesus is the answer to the shadowy sacrifices. It’s through His one offering that the end goal is available. It’s through Jesus, because he is better than the old shadows, that humanity can be brought to its maturity. We can be made whole. This was the ultimate end goal of the Eden experience. The garden was to expand, fill the earth, and bring God’s rule over the whole of creation.

## **Wells and Springs**

Much of this discussion (Jesus vs. the Law) can seem rather abstract to modern readers. We are so distant from the original context of Israel and the ancient Near East that we sometimes just can’t relate. I’ve spent the last few days trying to think of a more modern illustration, and now I’d like to share it.

I’ve mentioned before that Lisa and I currently live on a small piece of property just a few miles from our town. We’ve come to realize that living on small acreage has multiple benefits, but it also comes with a few unique responsibilities. Water is one of them.

Our property does not have access to many of the normal city utilities. We get electricity . . . but that’s about it. There’s no natural gas, city water, or city sewer offered to people who live on our street. But maybe most importantly, at least according to our two sons, there are no great options for obtaining high-speed internet! For years our access to the world was through a

satellite connection that wasn't very good when it rained. Did I mention we live in Oregon? Unfortunately, it rains quite a bit.

When we built our house, we made plans for these deficiencies. For instance, we use electricity instead of natural gas to heat the home and cook our meals. We installed a septic tank with a drain field to compensate for the lack of a city sewer connection. We also installed a well on our property as the water source.

The well works great. It's connected to a pump and a pressure tank that supplies good clean water to the entire property. The only problem is when the electricity goes out. This usually happens once or twice a year for short periods of time. When that happens, everything shuts down and no water comes out of the faucets. Power outages remind me that the water isn't just naturally flowing. It takes energy, effort, and money to get that water to flow.

It used to be, years ago, that properties like mine came standard with a hand pump or a bucket to get water out of a well. Everyday, people would go to the well to get enough water to supply the household's needs. A well or cistern is a man-made way of providing water. Getting water from that source is repetitive, and it requires effort and maintenance. A well will never just supply clean water on its own.

But some properties contain natural springs which replace the need to manually retrieve water. With a spring, water flows up and out of the ground and continually cleanses itself. Springs are superior to wells because they continuously produce life-giving water.

In many ways, the Old Testament Law is like a well with a bucket. It requires humanity to visit repetitively, over and over again, to access water and quench thirst. In contrast to the well, Jesus' ministry is like a natural spring where the life-giving water continually flows and satisfies humanity's thirst once and for all. This analogy might sound familiar because it's the

basis of a conversation Jesus had with a Samaritan woman (John 4:7–30). Jesus was resting at a well originally dug by Jacob, the father of the nation of Israel. Jesus used that well as an analogy for the Old Testament Law:

Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life. (John 4:14)

Later in the conversation, Jesus explains the analogy:

Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father . . . but an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. (John 4:21, 23)

The well water from Jesus’ analogy symbolizes the imperfect repetitive worship practices of the Law. Jesus was announcing the fulfillment of the well—a natural cleansing spring that will cleanse and quench thirst from within.

Here’s maybe the most important point of the whole story: Jesus said that the use of the well was already becoming obsolete, and that the living water was available for the taking. The ministry of Jesus’ living water was fully available way back then for the Samaritan woman. If that was true then, it’s also fully available today for the true worshipers of God.

### **He Takes Away the First . . .**

This concept of “once-for-all sufficiency” is presented in Hebrews 10:10, specifically regarding the sacrifices. But let’s back up just one verse and look further at the description the author gives.

He said, “Behold, I have come to do Your will.” He takes away the first in order to establish the second. (Hebrews 10:9)

Who is the “He” in this verse? In this context, who is it that takes away the sacrificial system and offers His own body in its place? It’s Jesus himself.

This is totally understandable when we talk about sacrifices. Most people today would, hopefully, agree that we no longer have to sacrifice animals at an alter to experience forgiveness, but the conversation often gets stuck when considering what to do with the other parts of the Old Testament Law. We know Christ’s sacrifice fulfills the animal sacrifices, but what other types of “once-for-all sufficiency” does Jesus bring to the other parts of the Law?

The author of Hebrews presents one all-encompassing argument about how Jesus is the fulfillment of the entire Mosaic Law. From the beginning to the end of the book, Jesus is found to be fully sufficient. There’s never a point in the argument where the author pauses to suggest, “This part, or that part, of the Mosaic Law isn’t fulfilled by Jesus; therefore believers should still observe that part of the shadow ministry.”

It’s important to understand this larger context as we travel back to the discussion in Hebrews 3–4 of sabbatical rest. If the “overall sufficiency of Jesus’ ministry” is true, we should expect to see the same theological approach being used there in relation to the seventh-day sabbath.

Jesus is the one who takes away the first. What is he taking away? In Hebrews 10 it’s the shadowy repetitive sacrifices in the law. They were repeatedly observed and yet they could never bring people completeness or maturity in regard to the fight against sin. Why did those aspects of the Law need to be removed? Jesus took the repetitive shadow ministry away because, if left in place, it would cause people to focus on the shadows when in reality the substance had arrived.

He knew the well would distract humanity's attention away from the source of natural spring water. So He "takes away the first," not just because he feels like it but because the taking away has a purpose. It allows people to focus on the fulfillment, the only thing that can get humanity to the end goal of maturity.

Humanity needed the imperfect reminders (before Jesus came) to know that this isn't the way it's supposed to be. They were reminders of our problem, and they were sufficient for their time. But ultimately the shadows can get in the way of clearly understanding the substance. It is this conclusion, regarding sacrifices, that will help us in our application of rest. So now, let's take our conversation back to Hebrews 3–4.

### **It's Back to Work . . .**

For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that.

(Hebrews 4:8)

The author of Hebrews uses similar logic regarding the repetitive shadow ministry of rest. The reminders of rest in the Old Testament were not one-time events. As we have seen, they were very repetitive. They happened once a week, as well as several other times a year attached to the festivals, every seventh sabbatical year, and every fiftieth jubilee year. Eventually these repetitions were applied in a land of rest where the people were reminded on a daily basis of God's faithfulness.

As we apply the logic of John 4 and Hebrews 10 to this discussion, what does the repetition of the reminders of rest suggest? What does it suggest they are incapable of? They are not able to get humanity to the final destination, the end goal of completeness, maturity, and our

fulfillment as people. In actuality—and rather ironically too—it’s in these shadows of sabbath that we are reminded of our *unrest*. They are a reminder of humanity’s sin.

This played out each week not only in taking a day off from the work of the curse, but in knowing each week that Saturday night was coming. In the Israelite community, when Saturday night at sunset arrived, it was time to get back to the work of the curse-a-day world. In modernity, we might think of this as “Monday’s a coming.” And what’s the general attitude behind that idea? “Ugh . . . I’ve got to go back to work! I can’t believe the weekend is already gone.”

By taking time off and resting from working in a cursed land, humanity is reminded that we are living the majority of our lives in unrest. But if these shadows of rest were able to bring about maturity and fulfillment, if they were able to get us to true rest, they would not have been repetitive in nature . . . just like the sacrifices.

So, if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. Who is the “He” here? I’m going to suggest something a little different. It’s not David (the author of the psalm being quoted). And I don’t think it’s God the Father either. In the context of Hebrews, the focus is always Jesus. It’s Jesus who speaks of a new day regarding rest. It’s Jesus who takes away the first in order to establish the second.

For if Joshua had given them rest, He [Jesus] would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God. (Hebrews 4:8–9)

The next question to ask is, “What is it regarding sabbath rest that remains?”

The answer to that question is, “Whatever type of rest Jesus offers . . . *that’s* what remains.”

I'll agree that it's easy, and sometimes inviting, to go back to the repetition of the shadows. But they can easily become "checklist items" which are marked off at regular intervals, and then forgotten again until the next time they appear on the list. Could it be that participating in a shadow ministry of repetitive rest might distract from what Jesus now offers? As we walk through the rest of this study, I invite you to contemplate with me what type of rest Jesus has brought to the table. Is it only one day a week that He allows us to experience rest, or is the fulfillment of rest something that is available every day of every week on the calendar?

Let me frame this a little more dramatically by purposely *misquoting* some of Jesus' words. When Jesus offers his rest to the weary (Matthew 11:28), do you suppose what He really meant to say was, "Come to me, all of you folks who are spiritually tired, and I will give you . . . respite care one day a week"?

We instinctually know that Jesus' offer is so much more than a lazy Sunday. And yet, historically, that's where many have landed. Since Jesus is offering the fulfillment of rest, let's further consider what that means.

### **Ironic Joshua**

The Greek word, Ἰησοῦς (pronounced "Ee-ay Seuss!"), is translated into English as two different names, "Joshua" and "Jesus." Translators have done this for reasons of clarity. Let me explain.

When translators think the New Testament text is referencing Joshua, the one who succeeded Moses in the Old Testament, they translate Ἰησοῦς into English as "Joshua" (Acts 7:45; Hebrews 4:8). But when they suspect the New Testament text is referring to the New

Testament character, the one who healed people and walked on water, they translate Ἰησοῦς as “Jesus.” The latter is by far the most common and happens 902 times in the New Testament.<sup>73</sup>

But make no mistake, in the Greek “Jesus” and “Joshua” are the same name. It’s important to understand, from a Jewish perspective, that Joseph and Mary were instructed to name their son Joshua. It was a name loaded with meaning, historical context, and cultural significance.

In Hebrews 4:8 the correct referent for Ἰησοῦς is the Joshua character who succeeded Moses, “For if *Joshua* had given them rest . . .”. But interestingly, some of the very early English translations picked the wrong referent in their translation. To this day the King James Version still reads, “For if *Jesus* had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.”

But that mistranslation completely changes the message that Hebrews is attempting to convey. If, according to the King James Version, it is *Jesus* who is unable to offer the ultimate rest, everything is turned upside down. Thankfully all of the modern English translations, including The New King James Version, have caught that early error and correctly state the referent, in Hebrews 4:8, as “Joshua” instead of “Jesus.”

What I don’t want you to miss is the linguistic irony happening in the passage. It’s an irony the author of Hebrews expected his readers to see. He mentions Joshua as the character that brings the Old Testament community into the shadow of the Promised Land, but that process didn’t work. That wasn’t true rest.

He would not have spoken of another day after that. (Hebrews 4:8b)

The “He” here is a general reference to God, and I’ve already suggested that in the context of Hebrews we could easily say it’s Jesus. But let’s not even read it that way. I’m going

to change it up yet again. Let's read it as "Joshua," because that's the way the original readers would have understood Jesus' name.

What's the irony? This verse could be understood as saying the following:

For if [the Old Testament] Joshua had given them rest, He [the New Testament Joshua] would not have spoken of another day after that. (Hebrews 4:8)

Jesus is the new Joshua. He is a Joshua, who is better than the Old Testament character, because He brings a better ministry. He brings humanity into a better place of rest. He does not do this in a shadow world, but in reality. That's the ironic twist hidden within this statement about rest.

### **Biblical Codependency**

Now we begin a more in-depth look at another aspect of Hebrews 3–4. This is where we will specifically be looking for the answer to the "so what" question. We will see that these chapters in Hebrews have a codependent relationship with some passages in the Old Testament.

My wife Lisa is a counselor. She's really good at what she does and has been fortunate to help many individuals and couples through life's sticky situations. I've also been the beneficiary of her professional expertise. When she was in school for her master's in counseling, she became more familiar with the dangers of "codependent relationships." What's a codependent relationship? Well, in the counseling world, it's an excessive emotional or psychological reliance one might have with a partner. It's unhealthy and can stunt personal growth and natural independence. Soon after learning about this, my wife and I quickly recognized we were involved in an unhealthy codependent relationship.

Hi, my name is Greg, my partner is "coffee in the morning" and I am codependent!

Whereas codependency is not good in personal relationships, Bible passages are often written to be codependent upon each other, and that's a good thing. It means that if we are to fully understand one passage, we must also understand the "excessive reliance" it has on its partner passages. The New Testament authors often wrote in this codependent way, matching a New Testament concept with its Old Testament partners. When this type of codependency was the author's original intent, we readers do a disservice to the text when we don't understand the dynamics of the whole relationship.

This is exactly what we find in Hebrews 3–4. The Hebrews passage is codependent upon portions of Psalm 95. And we will find that Psalm 95 is codependent on a story from Exodus 17. That's a codependent relationship involving three partners! My wife tells me this type of situation can get very complicated, so let me try and counsel you through it. Let's stop for a moment, get a Bible out, take a deep breath, and walk slowly through these passages. Like Lisa says, it's complicated.

Let's start by looking at the passage in Hebrews 3:7–11 that quotes part of Psalm 95 (I've italicized the codependent quote of Psalm 95 for clarity):

*Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tried me by testing me and saw my works for forty years. Therefore, I was angry with this generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they did not know my ways'; as I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'"*

This portion of Hebrews quotes Psalm 95:7–11, which discusses the generation of Old Testament people who followed Moses out of Egypt. But this isn't the only time the author of Hebrews interacts with that particular psalm. We see it pop up again in Hebrews 3:15; and 4:3, 5,

7. For some reason the author has created a codependency between the discussion of rest in Hebrews 3–4 with this part of Psalm 95. To more fully understand biblical rest, the author of Hebrews sees it as necessary to take us back to that particular psalm.

If you place the Hebrews passage right next to the psalm for comparison, you may notice that there are differences between how the psalm is written in the Old Testament and the way it is quoted in Hebrews. Theologians spend a lot of time examining these types of translational differences. One of those scholars, Karen H. Jobes,<sup>74</sup> explains:

[T]he Old Testament used by the Greek-speaking people of the first century was a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that is known as the Septuagint. . . . This is why sometimes in our English Bible a quotation of the Old Testament in the New actually might not match the corresponding Old Testament verse when we flip back to it. The New Testament writer is quoting an ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, and our English Old Testament is translated from the Hebrew. There is a whole field of study called Septuagint studies that examines and debates why the ancient Greek translation appears somewhat different in places from the Hebrew Scriptures we know today.<sup>75</sup>

We won't focus on most of the irregularities found in Hebrews 3–4,<sup>76</sup> except to pay attention to two place names: Meribah and Massah (Psalm 95:8). Hebrews 3:8 translates the meaning of those names (shown here in italics): “do not harden your hearts as when *they provoked me* [Meribah], as in the *day of trial* [Massah] in the wilderness.”

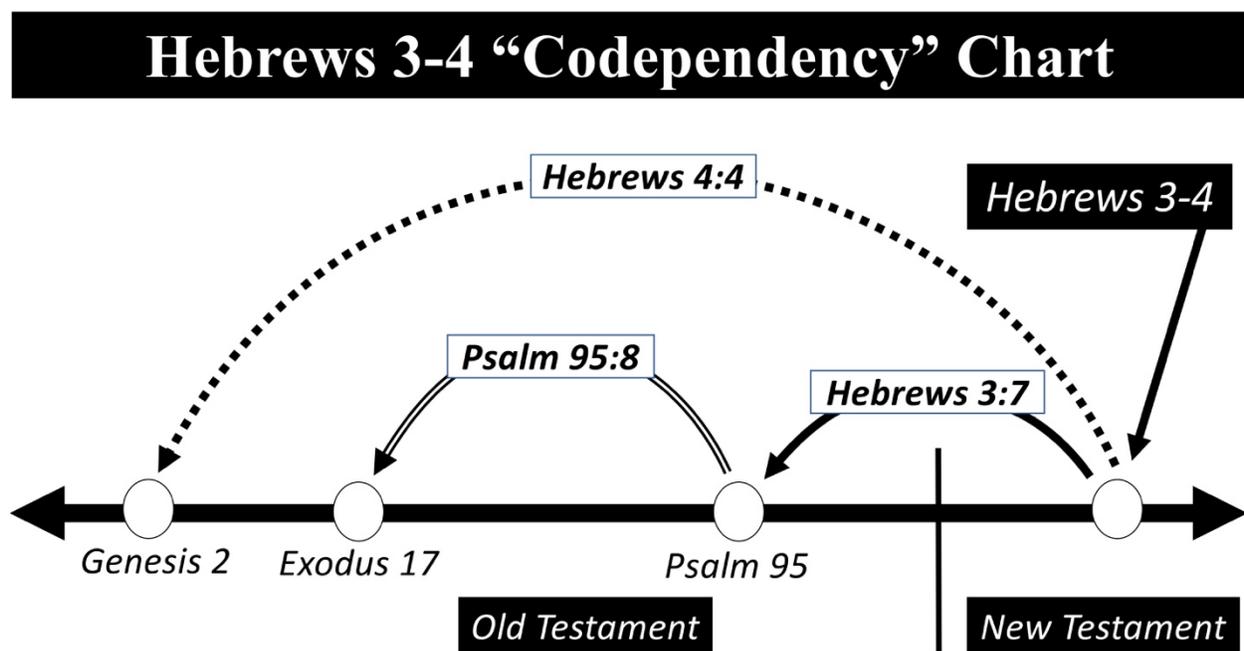
By tracking the Hebrews quote back to Psalm 95, we discover that the “rebellion” being discussed isn't describing the people's behavior during the entire time they were in the wilderness. Rather, the psalm refers to the specific rebellious events that happened at Meribah and Massah.

This might cause you to wonder, “Well then, what exactly happened at Meribah and Massah?” And that’s a great question! It’s the question the author of Hebrews wants you to ask, and it shows you’re beginning to understand the codependency of these passages. A quick check of cross-references<sup>77</sup> reveals that the two place names are associated with a story back in Exodus 17:1–7.

The author of Hebrews codependently uses Psalm 95, then Psalm 95 brings Exodus 17:1–7 into the relationship, and that’s where things get complicated.

### Codependency Chart

Well, that escalated quickly!<sup>78</sup> So let’s consider this chart which describes what we’ve just discovered.:



First let’s locate Hebrews 3–4 within the New Testament (on the right side). We just noticed that Hebrews 3:7 sends us back to Psalm 95 (the solid line arch). And the mention of

Meribah and Massah in Psalm 95:8 sends us back to Exodus 17 (the double line arch). Lastly, back in chapter one of this book, we tracked Hebrews 4:4 back to God's rest on the seventh day of creation in Genesis 2 (the dashed line arch on top).

When the author of Hebrews talks about rest, the idea is described in terms of these Old Testament passages. The original readers would have understood these examples intuitively, because the Old Testament was their history. Modern readers are often not as familiar with Old Testament stories . . . so we need a chart. And that's OK.

In a counseling session, realizing that a codependency exists is only the first step in solving the problem. Now let's figure out what all these relationships mean. Something that happened in Exodus 17 (at Meribah and Massah) has a direct relationship with the type of rest being described in the book of Hebrews. The author of Hebrews is warning us to not harden our hearts like the people did in that story, because they missed out on their opportunity of rest.

I've had the opportunity to do a little bit of traveling. Lisa and I have enjoyed several trips in the car to places close to where we live, but we've also had the opportunity to fly to places far away. I've found that travel always seems like a bit of a task. There's the packing, the planning, and preparing that always ends up being more work than I think it will be. Probably the most complicated trips I've taken are when I've traveled with groups to Israel. For these trips I usually host three or four pre-trip meetings to discuss things we will encounter on the journey. I make suggestions about what to pack, what type of power converters are needed in that part of the world, how much cash to take, and when to apply for a passport. Those trips are much more complicated than a simple road trip with the family.

You might be starting to feel as if this Hebrews passage is taking us on a bit of a complicated journey. To be sure, a trip like this, which requires us to venture into the ancient

Near Eastern culture and pop into and out of several different time periods, is not an easy trip. Rest is a complicated topic, but the journey is worth it. So let's continue exploring this elaborate neighborhood of rest.

In the next chapter we will dig a little deeper into these Old Testament stories and find some real “boots on the ground”—practical steps of how to enter godly rest. There's a rest that remains after the shadows have been taken away. It's a rest that will allow you to thrive and be exactly who you were created to be. You'll really like the destination, so let's continue on our journey.



## Chapter 6

### A Trifecta of Tests

I've recently had the opportunity to teach Bible survey courses at a few universities near where I live. A survey course is just meant to be a quick overview of the Bible. The classes are generally twelve to fifteen weeks long, and each class usually covers the content of either the Old Testament or the New Testament. As you can imagine, with that amount of content and that number of weeks, there's only enough time to discuss a limited number of biblical stories and themes. Covering the content of one testament of the Bible is one thing, but in one of my classes, I had fifteen weeks to cover both the Old and New Testaments. The whole Bible! The tempo of *that* class was exceedingly fast and furious. It gave new meaning to the term "overview."

While I always enjoy the opportunity in these classes to discuss major themes (like biblical rest) from a broad perspective, sometimes the rapid pace of the class can be frustrating for both teacher and student. Many in my classes have grown up in families where Bible stories were regularly read, but for some, my classes are their very first exposure to the biblical content. This presents a great opportunity for me, but also a bit of a dilemma when it comes to grading. I continually try to think of ways to adequately assess each student's grasp of the content. I want it to be challenging for those with a lot of Bible background, while not overwhelming for those who are hearing the content for the first time. How have I solved this problem?

Three tests. A trifecta of tests. That's where I've landed.

In my classes I give three tests, but not all the tests are of equal weight. The first two tests are worth a lower percentage of the overall grade. The last one, the final, is worth more. Why do I set it up this way? Well, I've found that it takes a while for students to get to know me, my teaching style, and the types of questions I like to write. After the first test, we take time in class to go over all the questions and answers. Those who perform poorly the first time usually do better on the second exam, simply because they know their teacher better. By the time we get to the final, everyone knows exactly what to expect. They know what style of questions they will see; they have the class notes available; and if they've done their homework, everyone can pass that test. In fact, I usually start the first day of class by reassuring all the students. I tell them, "The gospel is good news, and today the gospel is that everyone can pass this class!"

But unfortunately, as with most classes, not everyone does.

We could imagine God's relationship with the Hebrew people as this type of teacher/student relationship. As we read through the stories at the beginning of Exodus, we can think of it as God, the teacher, allowing His students to become familiar with who He is, how he operates his class, and what type of tests will be given. God introduces Himself, walks His students through the class syllabus,<sup>79</sup> then takes everyone on a field trip out of slavery to the shores of the Red Sea.

Interestingly, right after passing through the Red Sea (in Exodus 14), there are a series of three "tests" (that's actually what they are called in the text). It's a test trifecta, and just like in my classes, the final test is worth more than the first two. These three tests will explain why that wilderness generation failed to pass their class . . . and enter their rest.

In fact, these tests are a key to understanding the puzzle of biblical rest from Hebrews 3–4. Why would I say that? Because the last of these tests was administered at a place called

Meribah and Massah! That's not a description of two different places; it's just one location where something went so horribly wrong that it got two names. It's where the people failed their final exam.

Now, let's zoom in, and look at the series of events in Exodus 14–17 a little more closely.

### **They Cried Out to the Lord**

In Exodus 14, after the people had left Egypt, they found themselves on the shore of the Red Sea with Pharaoh chasing them. They were in a seemingly impossible situation, one they couldn't solve by themselves.

As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so, the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord. Then they said to Moses, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt?" (Exodus 14:10–11)

You might be tempted to focus in on the end of that conversation with Moses, but did you notice what they did first? They cried out to the Lord. I think that's a good thing. Crying out to the Lord is often a desperate plea for help. It is what humanity tends to do when they can't solve something by themselves. It's how people cope when they think there might be a God who can help them get through their circumstances. I think this first response is a good one, but then it's hard to ignore what immediately followed.

Then they said to Moses, "Grumble . . . grumble . . . complain . . . complain."

The people immediately began complaining about their circumstances. Later in the story of the exodus, these same people further develop this habit of grumbling and complaining, and

interestingly, we won't hear them cry out to the Lord very often. Moses will cry out on their behalf, but we just don't see the people doing it much.

Let's pause here and ask a few questions. What exactly is grumbling and complaining? Well, for the Israelites in the desert, their complaining usually took the form of questioning God's plan for their lives and for their redemption. Grumbling was their way of saying they knew a better way to run things than God. Does that sound familiar at all?

It should, because that's exactly how Adam and Eve responded in the garden of Eden. Their story doesn't say they grumbled and complained—it just says they chose to eat a piece of fruit from a tree—but the core of these two responses is the same. Both responses question the function and order that God has prepared and supposes there's a better way.

Did the Hebrews have a better plan? Well, they thought they did. They figured it would have been better to have remained in slavery in Egypt. *That* was their plan . . . to go back into slavery.

But, that's a horrible plan!

This seems rather obvious to us as we read the story, but remember, we have *their* entire story at our disposal. We have the benefit of knowing where God was trying to take them and we know how much their existence in slavery paled in comparison to that of the Promised Land.

The Israelites were making decisions without the benefit of everything we know. Egypt was all they knew, and it was strangely comfortable—so comfortable in fact, that they longed to go back to slavery even while poised right on the cusp of freedom. I think this is a human condition. Sometimes people choose to return to horrible circumstances even when an escape route is available. Change, even change for the better, is often very uncomfortable and scary.

Now let's ask, how your story might be similar? How might we apply these lessons to our own circumstances? Odds are that you've been caught in some sort of slavery to something. In Romans 6, Paul presents humanity's relationship to sin as a type of slavery, and in *our* journey out of sin, God often leads us through situations we can't solve on our own. Has this been your experience? When was the last time life pinned you down against the shores with no way to escape? Was it a financial situation? Was it something seemingly impossible at work? Was it an internal struggle, or something to do with your family?

Maybe more important than the type of situation you faced is this next question: Do you remember how you responded? Did you expectantly cry out to the Lord when faced with what was impossible without Him? If you did, what came out of your mouth next?

Was it "Grumble . . . grumble?" Did you, "Complain . . . complain?"

It's easy to complain when we can't yet see the end of *our* story. But let's agree to recognize this type of response for what it is. Through our grumbling we communicate to God our lack of confidence in His function and order for the world. It's how we suggest we could have done better. It confirms that we are like the Hebrew people in the wilderness. But maybe more importantly, it solidifies our ancestry all the way back to Adam and Eve.

The author of the book of Hebrews is correct! *Our* story *is* similar to the wilderness generation and our trip out of slavery will also lead us into seemingly impossible situations. These crisis points give us the opportunity to make decisions that can either lead to rest, or further wandering.<sup>80</sup> They are opportunities to either grumble and complain, or to trust the teacher's faithfulness.

Now, let's see how Moses responded to the people's grumbling.

### **Just Pick Your Seat for the Show**

But Moses said to the people, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today. . . . The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.” (Exodus 14:13–14)

Did you notice Moses’ first instruction?

*Do not fear!*

That’s interesting . . . and instructive. If there really is a God, you don’t have to fear situations you can’t solve on your own. I feel like I could just stop right here for a while and work on that. Maybe you could too. If God really is the one who brought functional order to the cosmos, and if He is the one who knows why things were created and how everything works, then seemingly impossible situations give us an opportunity to trust Him. There’s no need to try and create our own system of function and order. We don’t have to fear when we lack solutions.

Then Moses says, “Stand by . . .”.

He’s not instructing the people to just move aside. Maybe a better way to say this is “Get to a place where you can see what’s about to happen, because you don’t want to miss this.” He’s telling them to pick their seat for the show. God’s about to do something big!

When God works, His nature is revealed. When that happens, it’s important to be in a position—physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually—to recognize His work. It’s one of the fastest ways for students to get to know their teacher. So take a stand and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today.

Then Moses says, “The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.” The Hebrew word for “keep silent” is used almost fifty times in the Old Testament. The word has a lot of different senses to it. But most often it means just what it sounds like it means.

Shut up!

Just . . . stop . . . talking!

Or in this context, maybe: stop grumbling and complaining!

But in some other contexts, the word is translated as “listen in silence.” Slow down, listen to the silence, and hear from the Lord.<sup>81</sup> It can also refer to someone who is deaf, someone who is unable to hear. Used in this sense, it could mean, “The Lord will fight for you, even when you are unable to hear.”

It’s almost as if Moses is saying, “The Lord will fight for you while you, you who are deaf . . . while you stop your speaking . . . while you listen in silence. Just take your silent stand and, from that perspective, see the salvation He will accomplish for you.”

When we’re not complaining, and we find ourselves in silence with the Lord, then we’re in a position where we can listen. Listen for what? Well, for whatever it is that God wants to communicate. And God can communicate any number of different ways. In this specific story, God communicated by parting the waters.

This whole message ties nicely back into the instructions in Psalm 95:7: “Today, if you would hear his voice . . .”.

Did you notice the “if” there? The psalmist didn’t say “*when* you hear His voice.” He said, “*if* you would hear,” which lends to the option of not hearing. There is a possibility that you won’t hear. How is that likely to happen? Well, if we are complaining too much, we might miss it. If we are not listening, we might miss it. If we’ve gotten to a point in our lives where, spiritually speaking, we’ve become deaf, we might just miss it.

**Let’s Get a Move-On**

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward.” (Exodus 14:15)

God says, “Let’s get a move on!” This suggests that people can be “listening” for God’s voice and still be “active” and “going forward.” We might be tempted to think that the only time we hear from God is when we take time away and retreat from life. To be sure, retreating for a time can be very valuable; but at least in this circumstance, God is encouraging the people to get moving. Moses is about to raise his staff and the waters are about to part.

You might think, “How easy to get moving when the water parts right before you.” You’re right: in this story, when God parted the waters, the decision to “go forward” was probably pretty obvious. But sometimes God gives us the first set of instructions and expects us to act on those without seeing a “parting of the waters.” We see this in the story of Abraham when he sets off on his journey to a land that had not yet been identified. But he had his marching orders and he got a move on.

Hearing God’s voice isn’t a guaranteed thing. But today, if you would hear His voice, then you have a chance to trust in the Lord’s leadership and respond in faith. You have a chance to see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. And the Lord will fight for you while you “keep silent.”

For that particular group long ago, those who were broken down along the shore of the Red Sea, God showed up, with crowbar in hand, and connected His tow truck to their story—and in so many words, told Pharaoh, “This isn’t the way it’s supposed to be.” The Red Sea parted and the people passed through to safety. It was another chance for the students to get to know their teacher.

Was that it? Were those the only events where the people got to see God’s work? No, there was more to come. Let’s not let this well-known story, the parting of the Red Sea, overshadow the following, less-familiar parts of the narrative. For the students, the class orientation is over and the first of three tests is on its way. Let’s follow them on their journey into the wilderness.

### **The First Test: Marah**

As they continued on, the people pass through the waters of the Red Sea and travel three-day’s journey into the wilderness of Shur. This is where the students receive their first test, at a place called Marah (Exodus 15:22–27). The waters there were bitter; the name Marah means “bitter.”<sup>82</sup> The name is a kind of warning sign that says, “Don’t drink the water!”

When the people find out they can’t drink the waters, they begin grumbling and complaining once again to Moses (Exodus 15:24). They don’t cry out to the Lord at all—but Moses does on their behalf:

Then he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet. (Exodus 15:25)

This tree, when it was applied to the waters, turned the waters of death into the waters of life. It was on the third day in the wilderness that a tree from the Lord brought their salvation.<sup>83</sup>

There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them. (Exodus 15:25b)

There it is, the first of the three tests. On their trip out of slavery, there was a lack of water and God tested the people by bringing them into a situation that they couldn’t solve on

their own. God wanted to see their response. That was the test. How did the students respond? They grumbled and complained. They failed the test. Yet God was still faithful.

Does God do this today? Does He allow situations in our life to occur that we can't solve on our own? Does He sometimes even lead us into these situations because they are our path out of Egypt? Yes, He does. He wants to see how we will respond. He's giving us a chance to develop faith in *His* plan instead of trying to create our own. We might not always think we deserve our situations or agree with God's response. That's OK. Remember, we are used to living outside the garden, and the way God does things might seem foreign at times. But He's the one who knows how things work best. He's the one that created the order and the function of the cosmos.<sup>84</sup>

Listen to God's faithful answer in this particular situation:

And He said, "If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer." (Exodus 15:26)

What does the beginning of this statement sound like? It sounds like we are back in Psalm 95:7: "Today if you would hear His voice . . .". It's the same prescription, but here it's stated this way: "If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God . . .".

When you're given instruction from God and you've clearly heard His voice, if you follow His commands, this is what leads you into a deeper relationship of faith and toward your place of rest. If you don't . . . the biblical narrative suggests your heart will be hardened.

## **The Second Test: The Wilderness of Sin**

The next story in the narrative takes place in the wilderness of Sin<sup>85</sup> (Exodus 16:1–21). Again, God has led the Israelites into a seemingly impossible situation. They didn't have enough food and the whole congregation grumbled and complained that Moses had brought them into the wilderness to die from hunger (Exodus 16:2). What was God's response?

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction." (Exodus 16:4).

There it is—the second test!

He provides both bread and quail for the people (Exodus 16:12) and gives them specific instructions regarding how much and when to collect the food He is providing (Exodus 16:16, 19). Some students passed the test, and some didn't.

Interestingly, these are the initial instructions for the observance of a seventh-day sabbath (Exodus 16:22–36). We mentioned back in chapter 2 that these instructions were given before the people received the Ten Commandments and the law at Mt. Sinai.

Let's remind ourselves again what the seventh-day sabbath is. It's a reminder of the restful rule experienced in the garden of Eden. That was when humanity first heard the voice of God, followed His instructions, and lived with Him at rest. Here, when the Lord tests the people a second time, He inserts instructions to remember the type of rest experienced in Eden. God's telling them that the world of slavery they knew is not the way it is supposed to be. The teacher has something better to offer.

### **The Final Exam: Meribah and Massah**

Then we arrive at the final exam: the events at Meribah and Massah (Exodus 17:1–7). Remember, this is the place that’s codependently linked with Psalm 95 and Hebrews 3–4. It’s *this* story that both of those scriptures use to make their point.

Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. (Exodus 17:1)

God leads the people to a place where there was no water. Doesn’t this test seem like one the teacher has given before? Yes, it does, and this time they have a chance to learn from the previous test and do better. They have a chance to trust God’s plan and wait for His provision. But how did the people respond?

Therefore, the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water that we may drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you *test the LORD*?” (Exodus 17:2, emphasis mine)

And there it is, the final exam! But this time it’s the *people* who tested *the Lord*. The students give the teacher an exam! The tables have turned. The proctor has flipped. And it’s this response that kept the people from experiencing their rest, the Promised Land.<sup>86</sup>

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.” And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. (Exodus 17:5–6)

The people chose to grumble and complain, and it led to the hardening of their hearts. But did you notice that, despite their response, God was still faithful and provided exactly what they needed?

So what's significant about this event? Why is this event highlighted in both Psalm 95 and Hebrews 3–4? God had been gracious and faithful and gave the people a chance to learn from the previous tests and respond differently. But they didn't. Instead of choosing a faithful response of trusting God's plan and timing, they questioned Him the same way they had before and that's what flipped the tables. They developed a habit of questioning God and failed the final exam. That's why, this time, the students tested the teacher. That's Meribah and Massah, and it's this choice that prevented them from entering God's rest.

Today if you would hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me. They tried Me, though they had seen My work. (Psalm 95:7b–9)

### **Meribah—40 Years Later**

There is another Bible story that tells of water coming from a rock (Numbers 20:2–13). The name of that place is also called Meribah (but not Massah). While this may sound very similar,<sup>87</sup> it's an entirely different episode than the story in Exodus 17. It's in a different location and takes place nearly forty years later, but the similarity in name is a clue that the two events are codependently linked.

The first Meribah and Massah story (Exodus 17:1–7) involved the generation of people who came out of slavery in Egypt. This second Meribah involves their kids—the ones who watched their parents make poor decisions nearly every day. Those kids have now grown up and

become the new wilderness generation, and they are just months away from following Joshua into the Promised Land.

What's the situation in Numbers 20? To cut to the chase, there was a lack of water. For Moses, who had seen God be faithful in this way at the beginning of their journey, and survived the last forty years in a desert without becoming dehydrated, this situation was a great opportunity to once again trust God's plan. But in this story, unbelief got the best of him.

There was no water for the congregation, and they assembled themselves against Moses and Aaron. The people thus contended with Moses and spoke, saying, 'If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD! Why then have you brought the LORD's assembly into this wilderness, for us and our beasts to die here?'" (Numbers 20:2–4)

Did you hear that? Grumble, grumble. Complain, complain. These kids are just like their parents!

God then tells Moses to assemble the congregation and take the rod (the same one used in the Exodus 17 story) with him. But instead of hitting the rock, Moses is supposed to only talk to the rock before the people (Numbers 20:8).

So, Moses took the rod from before the LORD, just as He had commanded him; and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, "Listen now you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank. (Numbers 20:9–11)

I think it's safe to say that Moses was a little hot, and in a fit of anger he disregarded God's instructions. Moses hits the rock not just once—he wanted to make sure everyone saw, so he hit it again!

And water poured forth from the rock.

But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.” (Numbers 20:12)

This is the episode that keeps Moses from entering God's rest, the Promised Land. It's because of his unbelief—his lack of faith. Sometimes my unbelief shows up in fits of anger too. Is that the case for you?

What about the generation of grown-up children? God gave them a test: no water to drink. That's an easy test to give when you live in a desert! Those kids grumbled and complained, and yet God was still faithful. It was a good chance for this new class of students to learn about the faithfulness of their teacher. That's how God works. Everyone must take their own set of tests, and God proves Himself faithful to every new generation. Every new class gets to see God work, learn who He is, and then decide for themselves how they will respond to His tests.

And the good news is: everyone can pass His class!

### **Let's Summarize**

What are we supposed to learn from all these stories in Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers? Let's summarize the situation like this: Sin causes the world to live in a state of unrest. Humanity often doesn't listen to God's voice, and we try to solve the world's problems on our own.

But God has a plan. He has a way this thing is supposed to all work out. All He wants is for humanity to listen, hear His instruction, and get a move on. That's what rest is. It's not just believing, or listening, but *doing* what God says to do. That's part of the rest. That's living at rest with God, the true Sabbath. It's having a place to be and a thing to do.

We should also expect God to test us on our path out of slavery—not just in one area of life, but in multiple areas. He might test you with food or water. If not those, it will be something else that's become important to you.

He might test you with finances. Does that ever happen? You might be tested in your relationships. Let me suggest a few. How about your relationship with your parents? Do you ever struggle with your parents? What about your children (those of you that have them)? What about the relationship with your siblings? Those are never a problem, are they? Neighbors? Coworkers? People on social media? That guy next to you at the stop light?

It's not only relationships. What about your plans for the future? Is God going to test you to respond in faith regarding your future? How about your physical health? If you haven't experienced that yet . . . just wait, you will. What about your employment? Are you going to trust God with His plans for your job? Do you think He will test you in that area?

I'm not sure how *you* 've been tested. I only know the tests I've taken. That's the list I just shared with you. Those are the specific ways God has challenged me in my life. But I suspect you connected with parts of that list as well.

In the next chapter, I'll share an extended story of two of my tests. The first test came in my early twenties, and I failed it miserably! Then God tested me again, in a similar way, just before I turned forty. I'm happy to say I did much better the second time around. But again, more on those stories later.

Can we learn from God when he proves himself faithful? He will be faithful; it's His character. The next time a challenge pops up in a similar area of our life, how will we respond? That's the question. That's the warning. That's the test to see if we are able to remain restful, or if our hearts become more hardened in the process.

When we willingly fall under God's authority and trust Him with the circumstances of our lives, something interesting will begin to happen. He will have us apply a faithful response to areas in which He's never tested us before. A mature act of faith is learning to respond well in a new area of life. For instance, suppose God proved himself faithful early in your marriage in some unique way. You've learned to trust Him there, but then you have your first child. This is brand new for you. You've never been parents before. If you can take the faith lesson learned earlier in your marriage and immediately apply it to the first test you have regarding your children, you have the opportunity to remain in rest. God is inviting us to learn how to respond in faith to any new test that life may bring our way.

So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore, let us be diligent to enter that rest so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. (Hebrews 4:9–11)

### **Jesus Didn't Grumble**

What does it look like to live *fully* at rest with God? In Exodus 14–17, we are given examples of how grumbling and complaining can keep us from experiencing God's rest. But as we discovered in chapter 4, humanity can look to Jesus and His ministry as a study guide for

how to pass life's tests. Maybe the best example of this is the story of Jesus' temptation (testing) in the wilderness.<sup>88</sup>

The Gospel authors thematically link Jesus' baptism and testing in the wilderness (Matthew 3:13–4:11; Mark 1:9–13; Luke 3:21–4:13) to the events we've just studied in Exodus 14–17. In those Old Testament stories, we see Moses lead the people through the waters of the Red Sea, then into the wilderness where they are tested three times. These failed tests lead to forty years of wandering. Eventually, Joshua led the second generation through the flood waters of the Jordan and into the Promised Land (Joshua 3:6–17).

In a similar progression of events, we see Jesus, one like Moses<sup>89</sup> and Joshua, also pass through the chaos waters of death. After Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, He immediately proceeds to the wilderness for a "period of forty." It's forty days, not years, but that doesn't matter; it's all a hyperlink back to the Old Testament stories. Then Jesus receives a trifecta of tests. Can you see that Jesus is thematically taking the tests that Israel failed? Let's take a closer look at these Old Testament parallels from Jesus' time in the wilderness, from Luke's account.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days. (Luke 4:1–2a)

Jesus is in the wilderness being led around by the Spirit. What does that sound like? It sounds an awful lot like a description of that first generation in Exodus. They too were led around in the wilderness by the Spirit of God. When you see something like that in the text—something with an obvious connection to an Old Testament story—you're not supposed to just skip over it. You're being invited to recognize the codependency. So just use your pencil and connect those dots.

And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry.

(Luke 4:2)

Do we know any stories from the Old Testament where people were wandering around in the wilderness, and then became hungry? Yup—it’s taking us back to the grumblers and complainers who were hungry in Exodus 16.<sup>90</sup> Then, just like the hungry Hebrews, Jesus is given a test concerning food:

And the devil<sup>91</sup> said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”

And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’” (Luke 4:3–4)

How does Jesus pass the first test? He trusts the plan and reminds the devil of God’s instructions in Scripture. But we need to see His response in its original context to fully understand what Jesus is saying. Who in the Old Testament said, “Man does not live on bread alone?” You might have already guessed: it was Moses. In fact, look at the larger context of that verse:

All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply [something to do], and go in and possess the land [a place to be] which the LORD swore to give to your forefathers. You shall remember all the way in which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. (Deuteronomy 8:1–3)

You may have noticed I added the “something to do” and “a place to be” notes into that verse. Did you notice anything else—the testing, the hunger, and the manna? When tested with hunger in the wilderness, Jesus doesn’t grumble or complain. Rather, He quotes a passage that reminds everyone of God’s faithful provision in Exodus 16. It’s an example of learning from past faithfulness, and expecting the same faithfulness in the present. It’s Jesus’ way of saying, “God’s plan is the best plan.” It’s a restful response.

Then the devil tests Jesus a second time.

And the devil said to Him, “I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.’” (Luke 4:6–9)

How does Jesus pass the second test? He reminds the devil of God’s instructions given in Scripture. This time Jesus paraphrases from an earlier passage in Deuteronomy:

You shall fear only the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name. You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, for the LORD your God in the midst of you is a jealous God. (Deuteronomy 6:13–15)

Again, Jesus gives a faithful response. He does not grumble or complain. He reminds everyone of the instructions that had already been given. They are the instructions that describe how to remain at rest with God: worship Him only!

Then the devil tested Him a third time. And it’s Jesus’ final exam.

And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning You to guard You,’ and, ‘On their hands they will

bear you up, so that you will not strike Your foot against a stone.” And Jesus answered and said to him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” (Luke 4:9–12)

Did you notice, in this third test, that the devil started quoting Scripture—albeit out of context? This doesn’t faze Jesus at all. How does He pass the final exam? He reminds Satan—and all of us—that we are not to test God. But there’s also something Jesus *doesn’t* say that is instrumental to His statement. Jesus doesn’t quote the whole verse; He only says the first half of the sentence. And those familiar with this passage from Deuteronomy would have recognized the omission right away. So what is it that Jesus refers to, by not mentioning it?

You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah.

(Deuteronomy 6:16)

Did you see that? By choosing this verse out of Deuteronomy, Jesus is intentionally hyperlinking back to the events of Exodus 17, at Meribah and Massah. You might have noticed that the name “Meribah” wasn’t included above. Remember, there were two separate stories at places called Meribah (Exodus 17; Numbers 20), but only one of those can be described as where the people put the Lord to the test at Massah (Exodus 17).<sup>92</sup>

I find it interesting how often the story of Meribah and Massah is mentioned in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:16; 9:22; 33:8; Psalm 81:7; 95:8). If we add in the times it also gets an indirect nod in the New Testament (Luke 4:12; Hebrews 3:15; 4:3, 5, 7), it becomes clear that there’s an important lesson to be learned from the events at Meribah and Massah.

To pass *His* final exam in the wilderness, Jesus says, don’t respond the way the wilderness generation did at Massah—when they failed *their* final exam. This masterful response concluded Jesus’ trifecta of tests. Did you notice that He didn’t grumble and complain during

any of them? He responded in faith, fully convinced of the Father's character, trustworthiness, and ability to bring order and function to disorderly circumstances.

The Hebrews 3–4 passage spends a lot of time saying, “Don't do what they did. Don't respond the way they did at that place.” In contrast, Jesus' temptation in the wilderness is a great example of exactly how we *should* respond. It's as if the teacher is saying, “OK students, follow me in my response to the tests that life brings. You have a faithful God who is worthy of your trust . . . here's how to pass the tests.”



## Chapter 7

### Testing the Waters of Rest

All who have once or twice experienced the power of God, and distrust it for the future, are convicted of unbelief.

—John Calvin<sup>93</sup>

Here we are, at the final chapter. And just as God rested on the *seventh* day of creation, I feel it's appropriate for a book about biblical rest to conclude with a *seventh* chapter.

What have we accomplished so far? Well, in six chapters we gave order and function to the topic of rest. We took the chaos that exists around the idea of sabbath, and gave everything a place to be and something to do.

First, we put the seventh-day rest God experienced in Genesis in its rightful, and defining, place at the beginning. Then we allowed that restful “never-ending-functional rule” to give structure and meaning to all the other conversations we’ve had about rest.

We then put the reminders of rest in their proper place: in the domain of the biblical shadows. We now know that’s where they belong, and we’ve correctly identified their thing to do: they remind us of the restful rule of Eden, and point forward to the ministry of the “new Joshua.”

Following that, we looked at the New Testament’s presentation of Jesus. This allowed us to position His ministry of rest appropriately at the top of the list. He’s not only the human yoked alongside us showing us our restful work, but also the very God who originally defined rest,

created it, and guarantees its survival. It took six chapters to get our understanding of rest properly placed and functioning.

Thus, there was evening, and there was morning for six chapters. In this way the concepts surrounding rest were completed, in all their hosts. By the seventh chapter, we completed the work on rest that we had done, and now we rest, in this seventh chapter, from all the work we have done. Now God will bless this seventh chapter, and sanctify it, because in it we will find rest from all the work we have done.

OK . . . I hope you recognized that last bit as a corny adaptation of the seventh day of creation. Forgive me for taking that much license, but I wanted to make it clear that this chapter is all about entering into rest. It's a different type of rest. And let's hope it is, because all our previous efforts have left us wanting, wandering, and wondering where we went wrong.

### **Back in the Neighborhood**

In the opening chapter, I suggested that biblical rest is a neighborhood of highly interconnected streets. When we are able to back away from our current cul-de-sac conversations and see the whole neighborhood of rest, that's when we begin to understand what God means when He offers "rest."

I'm guessing this neighborhood is bigger than you originally expected it to be. Rest is woven into the biblical story from beginning to end. It's a very large network of concepts, ideas, and themes. You might be excited to share what you've learned, and yet intimidated about walking someone else down these streets. How might we introduce such a large labyrinth to those who are stuck in the cul-de-sac of the seventh day? Just start at the beginning, and walk them down one street at a time. That's what we've done *here*, and you can do the same *out there*.

But there's a part of this neighborhood we haven't visited. It's where you live. It's your own personal residence, the story of how God has shown Himself faithful in your life. When we articulate our personal stories, that's when the road map to sabbath rest begins to really make sense. So that's what I'll do in the pages that remain. I'll share pieces of my story, invite you to consider your own, and share how these concepts could completely change the way we think and live.

### **Sweet Spots**

In chapter 4, we discovered that Jesus' "yoke of rest" is not an invitation to idleness. It's really a call to action, utilizing a brand-new guidance system. When we attach ourselves to Jesus, and His yoke, He leads us to places we're supposed to be. And when we get there, it's Jesus' yoke that suggests to us the activities we are supposed to be doing. But what does it practically look like when someone is yoked to Jesus? Let's explore this in a little more detail.

Most who will read this book are very talented people. As members of humanity, each of us have been given abilities we enjoy and in which we excel. Our talents can be displayed in many different forms. Someone can be talented athletically, musically, artistically, or organizationally, just to name a few. Talent can spring forth in many ways. But no matter who we are, each of us have areas in our lives to which we are naturally drawn. Because we are members of humanity, and creatures created in the image of God, all of us have these "sweet spots."

Sweet spots are those things we do, that when we do them it's like, "Oh yeah! That's what I was made to do!" I don't know what that thing is for you. I know what it is for me. I experience that feeling when I teach. When I finish presenting something, I'm usually exhausted because I've been working hard. But because I've been where I'm supposed to be and I've been

doing what I'm supposed to be doing, when I finish I get totally amped up but I'm also exhausted. That's a great feeling! It's one of the best experiences in life. That's me when I'm at rest.

Have you experienced something like that in your own life? Maybe that happens when you're creating a song, maybe it hits you after finishing a piece of artwork, or maybe you planned a large event and when it was finished you felt the full satisfaction of a job well done. I don't know what it is for you, but I know there is something that you were made to do, and when you're done doing it you just know, "That's my sweet spot."

The problem is that many of us get caught working in the curse-a-day world, outside the garden, and far away from any sweet spot we may have.

There is nothing worse than being unfulfilled in the work that we do, but that's just the unfortunate reality for so many. When we find ourselves there, the real question is, how do we get back under the rule and authority of God? How do we find rest in a restless world of chaos and hurt? How do we find our sweet spot within God's restful rule, and function the way we're supposed to function as individuals?

The offer of sabbath rest that Jesus gives is an offer to be in a continual search for that place. And since it's a search within our sweet spots, it's not a worry-driven "have to" obligation. Rather, the search can become an exciting "get to" opportunity. There is nothing more freeing than God saying, "I created you for good works and I've given you a very particular set of skills.<sup>94</sup> Now, let's go see where and how you might be able to use your talents."

Remember the imperative from Hebrews, "He again fixes a certain day, 'Today,' saying . . . 'Today if you hear His voice . . .'" (Hebrews 4:7). What day is the sabbath? Hebrews 4 says, "It's today!" And the good news is: it's always "today"!

Jesus' offer of sabbath rest is not a one-day-a-week ceasing of activity. He offers the sabbath as a daily opportunity to hear the voice of God and respond in faith. If you listen for it, you'll hear Him invite you to places you've never been, and to consider doing things you've never done. He will offer unexpected situations that give the opportunity to use the talents He's already supplied. If you do hear His voice, the only question left is, "How will you respond?" Will you trust Him to lead you to a new place, or will you offer your version of, "Grumble, grumble, complain, complain"?

### **Moving Targets**

Another favorite movie of mine is *Napoleon Dynamite*. It's a great show full of enough one-liners to repeat one a day for a whole year. I also like it because the movie's talented lead actor, Jon Heder, attended a high school in my hometown! But it's a different character from the story with whom I most easily identify. In the movie, Uncle Rico is a rather awkward middle-aged man who is consumed by a desire to go back in time. No, this is not a science fiction movie—Uncle Rico just can't get past the fact that his high school football team lost the state championship game his senior year. Evidently, he was the team's backup quarterback and he thinks he would have played well if he had only been given the chance. He wholeheartedly believes that if his coach would have played him in the fourth quarter of that game, they would have won state. In his own words, "We would've been state champions. No doubt. No doubt in my mind."

Uncle Rico spends the better part of the movie practicing his football skills and talking about "winning state." Sadly, that part of his life is in the rear-view mirror, and there isn't any turning around. For Uncle Rico, high school football was a sweet spot. When he was the backup

quarterback, he was in his place and doing his thing. When that was over, he just had a hard time pivoting to find a new sweet spot. He didn't realize that, just like the second-string receivers he threw passes to in practice, sweet spots are moving targets.

Our "sweet spots" can change as time goes by. If I was able to take you back in time, we would see that in high school and college, I spent a lot of time in athletic endeavors. I trained for hours upon hours by throwing, catching, and bouncing spheres covered in cowhide. That was a big part of my life for many years—and just like Uncle Rico, I too never won a state title! Eventually the time came when my athletic opportunities came to an end; the ACL in my right knee snapped, and the competitive athletic part of my life was largely over.

This is about the same time I pivoted into teaching. When I got that first job teaching junior high and coaching, I knew it was exactly where I was supposed to be. I just knew it. It was a new sweet spot for me. But then, after three short years, my circumstances changed again with a job offer back in my hometown. That's when I started selling real estate, and it was a very strange transition for me. I originally had no idea I would end up in that profession. I'll share the story of this transition later in more detail. It was a restless part of my search for rest. But eventually, I found out that selling real estate back in my hometown was exactly where I was supposed to be. And then for a long time, fifteen years, that was a sweet spot.

But then 2008 happened. Do you remember back when the whole US economy just shut down for a few years? I didn't realize it at first, but God was beginning to say, "Real estate was your place to be . . . but now I've got somewhere else for you." Through life's circumstances, He was communicating that it was time to start looking for a new place to be. At that time in my life, I remember thinking, "What else is there that I could do?" I just couldn't see my next pivot.

Those circumstances began the unlikely transition to being a full-time pastor. And, I've got to be honest, those first few years of being a pastor were terribly awkward. It wasn't due to how I was treated at the church; the people there were wonderful to me. I just didn't feel like I was a pastor. It didn't feel like who I was. I had been an athlete, and a teacher, and a real estate agent, but I'd never been a pastor before. Yet even in *that* role, I eventually found my footing, and God confirmed that's where I was supposed to be.

Several years after becoming a pastor, God called me out of that position and again put me on a new search. That's where I find myself today. I'm once again looking for the place that God desires me to be. I'm searching for the thing He would have me doing at this time in my life. I'm pivoting.

In his book *The Second Mountain*, David Brooks describes what he believes to be the difference between a *career* and a *vocation*. He suggests careers are often chosen based on the highest return on one's investment of time and effort, and potential for upward mobility. But a vocation is a different type of calling. Vocations are often sparked by an annunciation moment, where something delights you and you become entranced by that thing. He describes it this way.

In the vocation mentality, you're not living on the ego level of your consciousness—working because the job pays well or makes life convenient. You're down in the substrate. Some activity or some injustice has called to the deepest level of your nature and demanded an active response. . . . Often people feel a call but don't really understand it. The summons to vocation is a very holy thing. It feels mystical, like a call from deep to deep. But then the messy way it happens in actual lives doesn't feel holy at all; just confusing and screwed up.<sup>95</sup>

God often leads us into situations that reveal our sweet spots. This can be one way He calls us to a vocation. As I look back on all the transitions I just described, most of the time I had no idea what I was doing. I often felt like a round peg trying to fit into a square hole. But each time, I felt like I was answering a call of some sort or another. Most of the transitions I've made throughout my life have had a little of that awkward stage. I think that's normal.

Sometimes a vocation can blossom into a personal ministry. We've all heard of someone who volunteers at, or maybe even creates, a nonprofit organization based on a vocational calling. It's also true that a person's vocation can even develop into a career. While a vocational career might seem like an ideal situation, it can also be a complicated marriage. When I became a pastor, at one level it was a vocational calling. But when I decided to also make it my career, I created a Venn-diagram-type situation where the two intersected. While my vocation and career often overlapped, sometimes my career obligated me to responsibilities that weren't a part of my vocational call. To the extent one can successfully negotiate these differences, a vocational career can be a very rewarding situation.

### **Testing the Waters of Rest**

After several knee surgeries in my twenties, I began competing in "sprint triathlons." These are races where the entrants swim a short distance, ride a bike as fast as they can for a few miles, and then run like the wind to the finish line. These exercises were good rehab for my previously injured appendages. But a cursory review of my finishing times in these "sprint triathlons" might suggest I never actually "sprinted" at all. In my first race, I rode a mountain bike with big knobby tires. The bike also had a full set of fenders that acted like spinnakers as I

rode. I rode so slowly that I recall three small children laughing at me as they rolled past on their Big Wheels!

My decision to become a triathlete caused me to spend many hours in the local swimming pool. I had taken summer swimming lessons in my youth, but had never learned the art of breathing between strokes without swallowing lots of air. It took me about six weeks to master that process. Once I figured that out, I grew to love all my time training in the water. Well, I enjoyed everything except one thing. It's one aspect of swimming I still don't enjoy to this day.

I hate getting into cold water!

I've never really gotten used to the initial shock of the water quickly changing my body's temperature. My disdain for this has caused me to develop a slow and calculated routine for entering these frigid ponds. I begin by putting only one foot in the water as I sit on the side of the pool. Then I slowly slide my second foot in alongside the first. After several moments (which I spend pretending I'm stretching), I'll splash some water on the rest of my legs, and then a little on my upper body. Eventually I put my swimming cap and goggles in place, notify my watch that a workout is about to begin, and launch into the water.

That's my routine. That's how I test the waters of the pool, en route to fully committing the entirety of my epidermis. It's just one foot at a time.

This is similar to the routine we might have when testing the waters of rest. God will bring new opportunities into our lives and say, "Trust me." But unfamiliar waters are often too risky to fully commit to in one jump. These are chances to dip our foot into situations we wouldn't normally choose on our own.

God does this for each of us. He's given each of us talents and abilities, and he brings people across our path who offer the chance to further explore our gifts. They often present themselves as "unexpected encounters" that leave us asking, "Why did I just have *that* conversation, with *that* person?" It's what God does for us. He leads us to unexpected encounters to get us thinking outside our little boxes. This is one of the ways He leads people back to their place of rest.

This process of following God into rest might seem like it should be more natural and comfortable. But these places are often awkward. Rest under God's rule and authority doesn't always take us to the places we would naturally choose. We are used to working, and making decisions, outside the rule of the garden. So when God invites you back into His space, don't be surprised when it awkwardly leads to unexpected places.

How do we find opportunities to test those waters? We listen for God's voice and step out in faith when He brings something across our doorstep. All we need to say is, "I'm willing to test these waters. I'm willing to sit down and dip one of my feet in that situation."

Sometimes the things we try are a perfect fit and we can just jump in and start swimming laps. But sometimes the things we try don't work out. I've tested so many situations where I got one or two feet into the water and it turned out to be all wrong. That's totally OK. In fact, I'm convinced sometimes that's exactly what God wants. He wants us to dip our foot into those waters, and then right back out again. It's often the lessons we learn in these testing situations that teach us new things about ourselves. They sometimes reveal skills that were previously unknown. They get us out of our comfort zone and trusting God.

You're about to finish this book. Soon you'll put it down and be faced with the reality of the world in which you live. What is God's offer of rest for you? It doesn't even need to be your

full-time anything. It could be something you do once a week, once a month, or even one time a year. Let's also be willing to move our thinking outside the four walls of our church buildings. God's doing a lot of good work within the walls we've constructed, but I'm convinced He's doing the majority of His work outside of those boxes. There are lots of places to be, and things to do in God's great big world.

The author Bob Goff summarizes our opportunity this way: "Every day, God invites us on an adventure. It's not a trip where He sends us a rigid itinerary, He simply invites us. God asks what it is He's made us to love, what it is that captures our attention, what feeds that deep indescribable need of our souls to experience the richness of the world He made. And then, leaning over us, He whispers, 'Let's go do that together.'"<sup>96</sup>

What kind of waters has God brought you to lately? I invite you to test the waters of rest. For some of you, just as you've been reading this section you're already thinking about something you thought you might try. You've already been reminded of a conversation you had last week, something God has put on your heart, or an opportunity you know is in your sweet spot but maybe a little outside your comfort zone. Maybe it hasn't even been a sweet spot for you in the past, but maybe it could be.

Thank God He calls us outside our comfort zones. That's how we grow.

I encourage you to share this journey with those you trust. Get support from people who know you well. Seek out others who encourage you to explore your place to be. Find folks who are searching for their thing to do. Much of rest is the search to find and the opportunity to display God's rule in a world that so desperately needs to see it in action.

So, today if you hear His voice . . . be willing to test the waters of rest.

## Warning Passages

The book of Hebrews is famous for its warning passages. Let's look at one warning in Hebrews 3 regarding rest, and notice the sense of urgency it describes:

Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. (Hebrews 3:12)

And just a few verses later, "So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief. Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it" (Hebrews 3:19–4:1).

Is it possible for a *believer* in Christ to be denied godly rest because of *unbelief*? On the surface, that question might seem like a contradiction. How can someone be a believer and also have unbelief? The author of Hebrews suggests this is more than a hypothetical situation—it's a real possibility.

Therefore, let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. (Hebrews 4:11)

Hebrews suggests that believers can come short of entering rest through some sort of disobedience. What type of disobedience? The kind of grumbling and complaining we saw at Meribah and Massah.

What does it mean for modern-day believers when they, for whatever reason, don't enter God's rest? Is Jesus' offer of rest an all-or-nothing situation, or is it something different? This is a big theological question<sup>97</sup> for sure. I don't plan on considering all the nuances here, but we must at least consider a few ideas.

First, to better understand the question, let's focus on the original wilderness generation and ask, "What did it mean for *those* people when they didn't enter into God's rest?" Remember

that the picture of entering into rest for this group was the offer of physically entering the Promised Land. To be sure, their lack of faith prevented them from entering God's rest, but did that end their relationship with God?

Some people might say yes. They read about some of God's responses and want to conclude that He wouldn't respond that way with people He loved. For example, at times God sent a plague on the people (Numbers 16:41–50), sent killer snakes into their camp (Numbers 21:6), and swallowed up whole families with "holy sink-holes" (Numbers 16:28–33). It might seem from these examples that God wasn't interested in further developing His relationship with these people. But those examples alone don't present the whole picture.

Let's remember that every day, for the entire forty years in the wilderness, God provided manna for these people to eat. Every week God built in a relationship-building exercise: they collected a double portion on the sixth day and didn't collect manna on the seventh. This is certainly a picture of an ongoing relationship.

We also know that God was guiding them by the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day during their time in the desert (Exodus 13:21–22; Psalm 78:14; 1 Corinthians 10:1–4). Also, throughout the entire forty years He was guiding them, daily, from the middle of their camp (Numbers 2:1–2).

As we look at these examples, we realize that the people's inability to have a faithful response didn't automatically end their relationship with God. But we also know that their unfaithful responses significantly changed the quality of their relationship.

When that generation failed to enter the Promised Land, they missed out on a restful-relationship opportunity. I don't mean they missed out on some "quality hammock time" in the land. Their unfaithful response caused them to miss out on living in the land at peace with God.

Instead of that existence, their relationship with God took place in the wilderness. Just think about what a difference this represents. The Promised Land is described as a place where there were already fully developed cities, homes supplied with everything they would need, plenty of water, and vineyards that had already been planted (Deuteronomy 6:10–11). Instead of that life, God faithfully provided for them in the barren wasteland instead.

It's this example we must apply to our own lives. Jesus has in mind a place for each of us. To be clear, this is not a promise to provide fancy clothes, an expensive car, or a big house. Those things are not bad in and of themselves, and it's fine if you experience some of them along your path. But God's promises concern so much more than those temporary indicators of worldly success. God is more concerned with the condition of your soul. We've all known people with enough money to buy anything they want but who are unable to purchase the rest that their soul desires.

If we hear Him and trust Him, we can follow Him into that place of rest and experience His provision for us. But if we don't hear, or don't trust, and in turn don't follow His direction, He won't abandon us. He will still be faithful, but it could be a significantly different experience for us than the one He had originally prepared.

How are you doing with these components of rest? Maybe you feel a previous life decision has landed you in a place you aren't supposed to be. You might be terribly weary from living where you are, but don't despair. You are not doomed to forty years of personal-wilderness wandering. Remember Jesus' offer:

Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. (Matthew 11:28–30)

Today is the day, no matter where you currently find yourself, to find His yoke, attach yourself to it, and begin following his directions to rest.

### **Is Sabbath Street Straight?**

What does it realistically look like to experience this type of rest? The Bible, as a whole, presents Moses as an example of both unbelief and great faith.

But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you have not believed Me . . . therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.” (Numbers 20:12)

This passage highlights Moses’ unbelief, but there are many other Scriptures that suggest that he was a man of great faith. In the New Testament, Hebrews 11 is often referred to as the “faith chapter” because it gives several Old Testament examples of faithful people. In that chapter, Moses is given more space than any other character (Hebrews 11:23–29). The author of Hebrews spends considerable time recounting many of the faithful events of Moses’ life, but there is something interesting at the end of these verses:

By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned. (Hebrews 11:29)

Did you notice? That last verse lumps Moses in with the whole wilderness generation that came out of Egypt. They—everyone who passed through the Red Sea that day—are lifted up as examples of great faith. And yet the same author wrote about those same people in Hebrews 3–4, and there chose to highlight their unbelief.

Both Moses and those he led out of slavery are described as having great faith *and* extraordinary unbelief. They are examples of great faith . . . and at the same time they are examples of how not to respond.

Without meaning to be pretentious at all, this sounds a bit like me. In fact, it sounds a bit like everyone who has faith. A trip down Sabbath Street is not always as straight a path as we would like. We will have moments of great faith, where our decision to trust God allows us to exist in an unhindered relationship with Him. These are often followed by moments of varying levels of unbelief that pull us in and out of that garden relationship. Real life shows us that these two realities are often, and unfortunately, seamlessly stitched.

### **The Dimmer Switch of Faith**

Some would like to define unbelief as a “lack of any faith,” but I like to think about faith in terms of a dimmer switch. I’m talking about the switches that control light fixtures. There are many different styles, but they all have the same two basic functions. The ones we have at our house have a toggle switch at the bottom. What does that toggle switch do? It’s a feature that turns the power on and off.



The other feature is the dimmer part of the switch. This is usually a knob that slides up and down. It allows the light fixture to display light at varying levels. It’s this feature that you

have to tell young children to keep their hands off, because it's really fun to play with. If you move the dimmer switch up, the light is bright. If you slide it down, you'll have a hard time finding your way through the room.

The important thing to remember is this: If the toggle switch is off, it doesn't matter what you do with the dimmer switch. But when the toggle switch is on, then the power is routed to the dimmer and the light can come through at many different levels.

I like to think of faith in this way. One aspect of faith is like the toggle switch; it's either on or off. You either have it or you don't.

But let's consider the story of Moses that we've been following in this study. He's a character who faithfully followed God for many years, yet in that one episode in Numbers 20 he's described as a man without faith. People tend to think of faith as an all-or-nothing commodity. Do you have faith? Yes . . . or no. In one sense, you can talk about faith in that "toggle-switch" type way, but I think faith is much more complicated than that.

Jesus talks about faith in terms not only of existence (yes or no), but of quantity and quality as well. There are times He refers to people of "little faith" (Matthew 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:18; 17:20), and at other times he describes people of "great faith" (Matthew 8:10; 15:28). Those seem like dimmer-switch descriptions.

I like to think that the Bible presents faith as more than just an on/off switch. When we hear the description of Moses as a man who acted in unbelief, we are probably misreading that if we think of him as a man who's completely void of faith. Rather, I think we're just reading a description of a moment in his life when the toggle switch is on, but the dimmer is way down to the bottom.

Are you a person with the toggle switch on . . . or off? If it's off, then stop playing with the dimmer switch! It won't do anything. For you, it's time to focus on the toggle switch and consider becoming a person of faith in Christ.

Once that toggle has been flipped, what can we expect through life? We should expect times of "great faith" where that dimmer switch is all the way up, the lights are bright, and we are seeing how God works in our life very clearly. Then, right around the corner from that experience, we might find ourselves with the dimmer switch down.

We need to know that just because there doesn't seem to be any juice coming through to the light, that doesn't mean the toggle switch is off. This is the picture of faith the Bible gives, and it's much more complicated than we sometimes make it out to be.

So what does it mean for someone to not enter into rest? For those in our Old Testament example it was a qualitatively different relationship with God, but because their toggle switch had been flipped, it was still a relationship. Instead of enjoying the land and the freedom that it offered, they were led around the wilderness. Instead of gathering every type of food the land would have provided, they got up every morning, collected manna, and drank water. They were on a bread-and-water diet. This is the qualitative difference between a restful relationship with God and one characterized by mistrust.<sup>98</sup>

So, if Moses is an example of sometimes displaying "great faith," but at other times "little faith," to whom can we turn to see a perfect example? Well, we already know the answer to that question, but let's allow the Bible answer it one more time. The faith chapter, Hebrews 11, is immediately followed by this statement at the beginning of chapter 12:

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with

endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. (Hebrews 12:1–2a)

Once again, Jesus is the correct answer to the question! He is the one with no deficiencies. It's His example of mature faith that leads to a life fully at rest with God.

### **My Personal Story**

I've chosen to close with a personal story that illustrates a portion of my journey into rest. I began teaching about biblical rest, in bits and pieces, in 2006. It's been a long journey of study for me, and an equally long path to effective application in my life. My wife and I have been challenged to insert what we've learned into practical situations life has presented over the years. While we've certainly not yet arrived at perfection, this study has greatly changed the way we look at opportunities for rest. It has also changed the way we've responded to some challenges life has thrown our way. Here's a defining example from our story.

Right out of college I taught junior high English for three years in Washington State. Then we moved back to Salem, Oregon, where I sold real estate for a while, and then I eventually became a pastor. It was the opportunity to work at my father-in-law's real estate firm, back in my hometown, that drew me out of that initial teaching job in Washington. So Lisa and I moved from Tacoma, Washington back to Salem, where we had both grown up.

This was such a major change in direction for me that we decided to officially just take a year's leave of absence from my school district job, just in case things didn't work out. We thought I might want to go back and continue teaching at my old job.

I don't know if you are aware of this, but while teachers don't get paid a lot, they do receive a steady paycheck with healthcare benefits. When we moved to Salem and I began selling real estate, it took me a few months to figure something out:

If you don't sell anything, the company doesn't pay you.

Let me just say that my first year did not go well. I didn't sell anything in the first nine months. My gracious father-in-law had extended a line of credit for us to use for living expenses until I got my career established. This seemed like a great idea when we didn't owe him any money . . . so we signed up. That first year, because I wasn't selling anything, we accumulated about \$24,000 in debt on that credit line.

You need to understand that the year prior, as a teacher, I had made \$21,900. So, in my mind, we were in debt by more than a full year's income. Even though we limited our expenditures to basic living and some business expenses, we were digging a hole pretty fast for our family.

I was doing everything I knew how to do. This was still in the early days of the internet, so I was forced to beat the bushes using some of the more traditional sales methods. I cold-called people on the phone, using a reverse directory. I walked neighborhoods and knocked on random doors, just hoping to find someone that was thinking about buying or selling a house. I was holding open houses almost every Saturday and Sunday.

It was awful.

It was bad mostly because nothing was working. It was the first time in my life where I honestly put my full effort into something and didn't get any favorable results. It was rather frustrating, to say the least. And for the first time in my life, I began to slip into a deep

depression. I struggled to get out of bed—not just in the morning but all day. It got so I didn't want to face another day at work.

I began to wonder if I ever should have left my teaching job back in Tacoma. I asked myself questions like, “Did we move back to Salem a little too fast?” I said to Lisa, “Do you remember back in Tacoma when we had a steady paycheck . . . with healthcare included?”

I began to romanticize the place we had been. Does that sound familiar at all? The people that came out of Egypt had a similar response.<sup>99</sup>

About nine months into my new career, the time was approaching for me to give the school district an answer regarding my year's leave of absence. I had to let them know whether I was going to return to teaching. Lisa and I wondered whether or not we should try to stick it out in my new job in Salem.

We agreed we would pray about the situation. Those prayers sounded something like this: “God, I've tried everything I know to do to solve this situation we're in. Four weeks from now, unless you present something better, we think returning to Tacoma is our best option. If we do that, we will just have to slowly pay back our debt as best we can.”

That's what we prayed. How depressing!

I'm not sure if you recognized it, because I hid it within the language of my prayer, but that was me grumbling and complaining. I may have dressed my language up in its Sunday best, but I was letting God know that He had made a mistake, and that I had a better plan. It was my bite of the forbidden fruit.

But about two weeks into our “month of prayer,” the home builder for whom I had been conducting open houses unexpectedly expanded their business and bought building lots in a

second subdivision. I inherited a few listings in the old subdivision because their agent moved to the new location.

It was during one of their open houses, in the third week, that I met a couple who was interested in building a house. I sat that couple down with the builder. They agreed on a price and I wrote up a sales agreement.

It was in the fourth week that I wrote two more offers.

We had given God a four-week time limit. During that span, I wrote enough business that, when it eventually closed, we were able to pay off our entire line of credit. And with some additional sales that followed, we were eventually able to deposit a large amount of savings in the bank.

At the end of these four weeks, Lisa and I looked at each other and said, “What . . . just . . . happened?” We had been looking at each other for the nine months just prior to that wondering what was happening. Then God, in a way we could not have imagined possible, miraculously proved himself faithful in the area of finances in our lives. I would have been happy with enough money to pay off only half the debt, but that’s not how God answered.

Well, things went pretty well for the next twelve years. We had a great real estate market during that time, but then 2008 showed up.

That’s the year several parts of the financial sector fell apart over a relatively short period of time. As a result, people couldn’t get loans as easily as they had before. They couldn’t get loans to buy houses. They couldn’t get loans to build houses. This is not good news if you happen to be a real estate agent.

Within two or three months, everything in my line of work quickly ground to a halt.

Lisa and I had saved some money because we had lived on less than we made for several years. There was about six months where I tried everything I knew to do to create more business. But the market had changed so much that nothing was working.

Does this sound familiar at all? The circumstances were dramatically different than the first time, but it was eerily familiar for us. That's the way it is when God puts impossible situations in your life. The circumstances may be dramatically different, but parts of the test will seem very familiar.

Once again, having tried everything we knew to do, Lisa and I had a decision to make. We saw that our savings was running out. We were in another financial crisis that we weren't able to solve on our own.

So let me ask a question: Based on everything you've read in this book, what two options did we have in regard to our response to these new circumstances? We could have grumbled and complained—but this time, a new choice was available because of the way God had miraculously responded in faithfulness the first time. We could trust in God's faithfulness and wait for His plan and timing to be revealed. By this time in our lives, I had already discovered the lessons out of Hebrews 3–4, and I had been teaching them to others in many different settings. So that created a little more pressure.

Lisa and I sat down and we literally said, "OK, we have a choice. How are we going to respond?" And here is the prayer we came up with:

"God, we have no idea how you are going to solve this one, but we trust that you can. We will keep working, doing everything we know to do along the way, but we will have our eyes and ears open anticipating an unexpected solution. We will wait and trust for your timing."

That's as close as we could come to a "Jesus response" out of *His* temptation story. Let's wait for God and expect something miraculous to happen.

About three weeks after saying that prayer, I got a call from a pastor who I had helped purchase a house a few years before. We had developed a friendship. He had offered me a job at the church several times when the real estate market was doing better. My response had always half-jokingly been, "Oh Pastor, you can't afford me."

This time I heard his voice on the other end of the line. He asked, like he always did, "When are you going to come work for me?" I actually said to him, "Pastor, I think you can afford me now!"

Over the next two months I accepted a full-time pastoral position at that church. During that time, I also began talking to agents in my real estate firm about possibly purchasing my company. That doesn't usually happen in a down real estate market, but that's exactly what happened. About six months into my new job at the church, I finalized the sale of my real estate company to a group of those agents.

Just like the first time, God's solution was quite unexpected. I didn't ever envision myself ending up on a church staff. But our response this time led to a completely different experience for Lisa and me. This time we had a hopeful prayer, and we expected God to be faithful.

I can only describe it as restful.

We experience rest as we fall under the authority of the One who has more control than we do. And thank God that He does. How ironic is it that godly rest isn't about taking time off from work, but rather trusting God to lead us into the work He's created us to do?

**What's the Question?**

One question I've heard is, "How has God shown Himself faithful in your life?" I've just shared one example from my story, but that's not the only time Lisa and I experienced God's faithfulness—not even close! I know if you're a person of faith, and have been walking with the Lord for any amount of time, you have your own stories of God's faithful work in your life.

What are the areas in which He's tested you? What was your response when He tested you? What could your response be in the future? Could it be different . . . better . . . more restful?

I briefly mentioned it earlier, but I think it's appropriate to repeat it again, "According to Hebrews 4:7, what day is sabbath rest available to the believer if they hear God's voice?"

The answer is "today," and it's always today.! No matter when you are reading this, it's the sabbath! So today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart. Rather, let your heart become softened by the faithfulness of God, and trust Him enough to fall under His functional rule.



## Afterword

### The Eighth Day

The bulk of this book has been dedicated to rethinking our understanding of biblical rest. We now understand that godly rest is not a lazy day in a hammock. It's really the ceasing of our own attempts to rule, and our active engagement in the world using the gifts and talents God has given us. When we rule, subdue, cultivate, and keep within God's plan, we can experience the rest that's available through Christ.

In chapter 1, I suggested that God's restful rule continued past the seventh day of creation on into the eighth day, the ninth, and so on. God's rest has never ended. And if, as the author of Hebrews suggests, a believer's rest is similar, it's important to explore some practical ways that we can stretch our rest as well to an eighth day, a ninth day, and beyond. So, before we close, let's extend the neighborhood metaphor a little and consider some simple practices that can help us safely avoid the common distractions, dead-ends, and dangerous situations often found on the streets of sabbath.

### Resetting toward Rest

Our new understanding of rest will require us to periodically reset toward rest. Why would we need to develop a routine of resetting our focus back to rest? It's because the curse-a-day world is continually trying to pull us off course. And one wrong turn can greatly affect our

destination. What does a reset look like? Well, there's a lot of flexibility in how one might implement this concept, but at a minimum, it should be a regular examination of where you are, what you've been doing, what God's recently put on your plate, and careful consideration of your next steps in the process. Let's remind ourselves of some of the points we've covered.

In chapter 7, I suggested that each of us has sweet spots in our life: areas where God has gifted us. Within these spaces, we experience true joy. Part of a reset toward rest is the continual search for meaningful activity within these spots. It is recognizing they are mobile and changing, and thus will require our willingness to pivot, when necessary, to be able to utilize them. But remember, we are not on our own in this search. When we attach ourselves to Jesus' yoke, the Holy Spirit guides us along the way. All we need to do is pay attention and know what to look for.

The longer I live, the better I become at recognizing when God's communicating. He sometimes speaks through my study of Scripture. At other times He uses the people around me who I know and trust. But more and more, I'm finding He communicates to me through unexpected events. God often brings me into situations that at first seem to happen by chance, often through conversations with people I've never met. Someone will present a need, offer a service, introduce me to a new concept, or connect several ideas. I used to just chalk these situations up to coincidence, but now I sometimes recognize them as God's voice.

And I know I'm not alone. Every day God makes connections and sets up unexpected appointments. When we recognize these encounters for what they might be, we can begin to incorporate them into our resets. We can regularly assess what's happened, and think of ways to test those new waters.

You may want to work a reset toward rest into your daily routine. It may be that once a week you take some intentional time to consider what unexpected things God has brought your way. You might want to evaluate your level of joy once a month, or reconsider your work once a year. When we reset, we can acknowledge how we have been pulled off course. It's a chance to be reminded of how we best bear God's image, what it is that floats our boat, and how we can go sailing more often. It's an opportunity to refocus our direction toward the God who created us, knows us best, and offers a better rest.

I've suggested that we could consider the topic of biblical rest as a neighborhood of highly interconnected streets. We've explored how our current conversations about the seventh-day sabbath have prevented many from exploring the rest of the neighborhood. Our new approach to rest will allow us to safely back out of those cul-de-sacs. But there are other dangers that threaten our restful trip through the streets of sabbath.

### **Cultivating and Keeping Health**

Poor health can be a huge distraction from the rest that Christ offers. Exercising stewardship over our physical, emotional, and mental health is one of the most important steps in our journey of rest. While there are always aspects of our health we can't control, it is still our responsibility to treat them as best we can to ensure the most restful journey possible.

At some point in your life, you've probably had a physical ailment that sidelined you for a period of time. When that happens, it's helpful to have someone diagnose what's wrong, suggest treatment for the injury, and set a plan for recovery. This is the process I've experienced for each of my knee injuries. As soon as I realized something was wrong, I scheduled time with a

specialist to diagnose the pain, we set a plan to fix it, and I worked the plan as best I could to get back to health as soon as possible.

We are all familiar with that process when it involves caring for our physical health, and a similar process is available for our mental and emotional health. When we recognize that something is out of balance mentally or emotionally, we can seek out people who specialize in those areas, let them help us diagnose what's wrong, and set a plan for treatment. The goal is to always get back to our best functionality as soon as possible so we're not distracted away from the restful journey that Christ has for each of us.

For example, the effects of traumatic experiences on our health can be one of the most dangerous distractions in our journey. While trauma can sideline our mental capabilities and injure us emotionally, the physical results can also be debilitating. While our culture is becoming more aware of the effects of trauma, in many circles it is still not acceptable to admit that, to some degree, we've all been traumatized. Our traumatic injuries may be something in the past, a present reality, or maybe even both. Sometimes the only way to heal is to seek outside help to diagnose the cause and treat it appropriately. The results of trauma don't have to be a dangerous distraction away from rest. When properly treated, it can even become an important and meaningful part of our journey.

Curtis Zackery, author of *Soul Rest*, speaks to the importance of this inner work: "In our culture, it is clear that we value, elevate, and celebrate superficial self-improvement. It seems, though, that inner work has a certain stigma. If someone has adopted a borderline maniacal exercise regime, no one thinks it's out of sorts. But, when someone suggests that they are seeing a counselor or attempting to order their inner world, there is somewhat of a pitying response. . . .

We have to fight against the stigma that comes with focusing on our inner well-being so we can find holistic healing.”<sup>100</sup>

While some trauma comes in big and dramatic experiences, it can also be handed out in small, bite-sized chunks. Everyone experiences day-to-day activities that over time can build up and drag us down. Without a break from these annoyances, they have the ability to pile up and become another type of distraction. Our jobs can be one common source of these daily stressors. Even if you are in a job you love, one that utilizes your gifts and talents, there are parts of that job that can pile up and become hard to handle. While I love to teach and really enjoy the face-to-face interactions, I find that other parts of that job can sometimes overwhelm me.

In order to regain a proper perspective, one effective treatment for these stressors is to schedule time away from them. This isn't running and hiding from these distractions; it's recognizing that these little things can add up and that a break can, at least temporarily, clean the slate and help us better negotiate our restful journey. We can come back refreshed and ready to enjoy our place to be, and once again answer the call for our thing to do.

How could you establish intentional routines that allow you to treat the different aspects of your physical, mental, and emotional health? Are there things you can build into your daily schedule that will keep your body in physical condition? Do you need weekly conversations with those who can help you unpack your emotional baggage? Would a monthly weekend, away from your stressors, be a good way to regain your focus? What could you do quarterly, or once a year, to make sure your mental health doesn't distract you from who God is calling you to be?

Each of us have the freedom to explore and establish the routines that best cultivate and keep our own health. And since life will continually throw these distractions our direction, your process will need to be revisited regularly.

## Separating From Sin

Another danger in our journey is the entanglement of sin. Just like our health, sin can be a roadblock to rest. When we travel down the side street of sin, our ability to experience God's rest is greatly affected.

In chapter 1, we looked at the creation of the cosmos and the unique role that God has given humanity within His creation. We are to rule, subdue, cultivate, and keep. The problem is, we tend to gravitate toward those tasks with our own plan and for our own glory. We sin when we take on that role and attempt to rule without Him. The Bible includes valuable instruction regarding how to avoid this deadly dead end.

In chapter 7, we briefly discussed the first verses of Hebrews 12. Let's consider those words again, but this time in regard to the author's encouragement to believers regarding sin:

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

(Hebrews 12:1–3)

There's a lot packed into those three verses, but did you notice what it says about sin? The author encourages us to "lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us." That's what sin does: it entangles and prevents us from getting about our business. And

what's our business? It's ruling and subduing the earth the way God would have us do for His glory.

But let's also notice the first part of the author's instruction. He directs his readers to "lay aside" the sin. The author chose to use the Greek "middle voice" for this action. It signifies that the subject of the sentence (the believer in Christ) participates in the action (laying aside encumbrances and sin). In other words, believers have a responsible role in regard to their separation from sin.

There are several scriptures that similarly describe this process of disentangling from sin (Romans 13:12; Ephesians 4:17–32; Colossians 3:5–11; James 1:21; 1 Peter 2:1). In Ephesians 4:22–24, Paul explains that in the process of laying aside our sin and replacing it with the attributes of Christ, something magical happens to our spirit. We are "renewed," and this renewal is stated in the passive voice, which sounds exactly like what it means: we are passive in that process. It happens to us. Our renewal is not something we do—it's what we receive from God. It's His work in us, and it's what allows us to work with Him in the process. In other words, the way we are able to avoid the dead end of sin is not just by our own efforts to be good. A vital element of this process is that God is renewing who we are, and the way we think, along the way.

It's also important that we invite others into this process with us. When we surround ourselves with those we trust, they can help us see things about ourselves to which we are blind. So today, if you've heard his voice, begin praying for renewal, surround yourself with trustworthy people, and don't be surprised when separating from sin begins to sound unusually attractive.

With a plan in place for maintaining our health, and having constructed space from our sin, we will have the proper perspective to consider the risk of ruts in our road.

## **Removing Ruts**

The last danger we will discuss in the neighborhood of rest is the risk of traveling within dangerous ruts. People are creatures of habit. We love our routines, and they are important for our survival. But the habits that begin as the most helpful of grooves can eventually turn into dangerous ruts in our road. When routines become too ingrained, they can cause us to take our hands off the wheel, not pay attention to the direction we are headed, and potentially miss God's instructions to make a turn in our journey.

In our pursuit of sabbath rest, it is essential to set up routines that help us stay securely hitched to Christ's yoke. These can be daily rituals, weekly habits, or monthly reminders that keep us focused. At times, the obedience Christ encourages is only possible through the creation of such disciplines. And as we've already discussed in this section, the routines we establish can help keep us away from dangerous distractions in the neighborhood. If you meet with others in a small group or as part of a church family, you may have some of these helpful routines already in place. Those settings can be great places to maintain health, separate from sin, and reset back toward rest.

In chapter 5, I suggested that it's sometimes inviting to go back to the repetition of the shadows. I discussed how repetitious routines can become meaningless "checklist items" which are marked off at regular intervals and then forgotten again until the next time they appear on the list. This is one way a good groove can become a distracting rut. If we are to effectively travel in this neighborhood, we can no longer just put our head down and blindly follow a prescribed formula. The routines we need require more pliability than any checklist can offer. When we

attach our soul to the one who knows us best, the path will often lead to places we've never been. Our route can change quickly, and listening for God's voice of direction is essential.

Remember the message from Hebrews 3:7: "Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today if you hear His voice . . .'"

When God calls, and that can be any "today" of the week, we need the flexibility to hear Him and respond in step. Grooves allow for these periodic lane changes, but ruts tend to lack this flexibility.

How can we maintain our routines so they don't end up rigid distractions? One helpful tactic is to create intentional obsolescence into your itinerary. This is the idea that we plan, and create the mechanisms necessary for, the regular paving over of any ruts that may develop. Since we are creatures of habit, we sometimes cling to them long after their usefulness is gone. What we need now, and what is good now, is not always the same thing that our past selves needed, or that our future selves will require.

When I worked as a pastor, our staff would often ask the "groove versus rut" questions about our church activities: "Why are we doing what we do? Are we doing this just because it's what we've always done? Is this activity still meeting our needs as a congregation? Is there another groove we could get into that would serve our needs in a better way?" When our staff took time to evaluate what we were doing, we found that some of our events and programs had long ago lost most of their function and purpose. Some of the traditions, usually the ones we were holding onto most tightly, had unknowingly become dangerous distractions. What were once grooves for our church had over time become ruts in our road.

What are the routines you already have to help you experience sabbath rest? Are those activities in line with your new understanding of this topic? When we rethink rest the way we

have, it can be an exciting time to reevaluate our longstanding practices to see if they are still helpful for our journey. It may be that we only need a small adjustment—or we may need to start from scratch, repave the road, and find a whole new groove.

## **Reframing Rest**

In the first chapter, we described how much incongruity and confusion the idea of sabbath has within our modern culture. Everyone has a slightly different idea about what sabbath is and how it should be observed. We often need to dig deeper to understand exactly what people mean, and it's common to find that the whole theology has been truncated into just one weekly event.

After this study, we should now realize the weekly sabbath was really only a small part of a much larger theology of rest presented throughout the Old Testament, and that Jesus fulfilled not just one part, but the whole thing. He has invited us as partners into a new covenant. Christ's ministry reframed rest into something new, and our practices should reflect His fulfillment.

Because of all this, we might consider altering the vocabulary we use when speaking about sabbath rest. If people think we are just entering into a cul-de-sac conversation about the seventh day, they will likely miss the breadth and depth of Christ's easy yoke. But when we use new phrases to describe biblical rest, we can begin to leave the confusion behind and invite others to join us on a whole new path.

We've already started to do this to a degree in our culture. We often call an extended break in our routines a "sabbatical." That's a term we've adapted from the text and given a new meaning. When I describe my sabbath experience to others, I've gotten into the habit of using some new categories. You might hear me say something like: "Once a week I celebrate sabbath .

. . by seeking out new sweet spots.” Statements like this not only remind *me* what Christ’s rest is all about, but it also prompts questions from *others* who also need to know. They’ll ask, “What did you mean when you said ‘sweet spots’?” And that can be an opportunity to help someone else on their path to rethinking rest.

We can also reframe rest by more correctly observing the signs of the new covenant. In chapter 4, we discussed how baptism and communion are signs of our inclusion in Christ’s covenant. These signs should be reminders to listen for His voice and follow His direction. We can move baptism back into its rightful place as the sign of an initial faith experience. We can also help transition communion into the meaningful meal it once was by presenting its symbols for all their worth. These are signs of the most important covenant the world has ever known, and we have the opportunity to reframe these meaningful moments back toward rest.

Finally, let’s remember that the author of Hebrews suggests there is a sabbath rest that remains for the people of God. It requires us to rest from our works, the same way God did from His. It describes a transition that is monumental in scope and life-changing in practice. So let’s be diligent to enter that truth, thrive in the reality of Christ’s fulfillment, and more fully experience the rest of our covenant with Jesus.

## Acknowledgements

I began the dive into the topic of biblical rest in my master's program back in 2006. The road from those first ideas to the completion of this project has spanned a significant portion of my life and learning. And there is a "great crowd of witnesses" who have contributed to the process.

It was a professor, Gary Derickson, who first directed my eye to how Hebrews 3–4 refers back to the Israelites' crisis moments in the wilderness. He also pointed out how grumbling and complaining contributed to their experience of rest. My friend, Chip Bennett, was the first to suggest I look into John Walton's work regarding rest. It was Walton's ideas that shifted the foundation of my thesis. As I formulated my ideas into the final project for my doctoral studies, I received valuable input from several professors including, but not limited to, Karen Jobes, Warren Gage, Scott Manor, and Sam Lamerson.

It took several years, alongside some difficult life circumstances, to convert my doctoral project into the work you find here. I developed an outline from a class I taught at my church and began the writing process. So many people gave valuable feedback along the way. Thanks to my beta readers Rachel Baugh, Brenna Brutcher, Chandler Brutcher, Bob and Lori Cavell, Frank Flemming, Jodi Hall, Lisa Hall, Julie Haupt, Esther Libby, Jerry Morris, Madison Mullen, and Eric Weber. Rachel Baugh is solely responsible for editing out . . . the overabundance of . . . ellipses in my early drafts. Thank God I've been mostly cured of that. . . .

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This book is dedicated to my parents Larry and Eleanor Hall; to my sister Jodi; to my wife Lisa; and to our children Jacob and Nathaniel. We've seen a little of what the chaos of life can bring. Now, let's all get some rest!

### **About the Author**

Gregory Hall is a husband to his high-school sweetheart, and father to two twentysomething young men. He hosts the Rethinking Scripture Podcast, where he challenges listeners to rethink what they thought they already knew about the Bible. He's been a college athlete, public school teacher, real estate broker/investor, triathlete, small-business owner, pastor, tour leader to Israel, and university professor. This medley of life experiences has meshed nicely with Greg's biblical training (MA in Theological Studies and Doctor of Ministry in Biblical Preaching and Teaching), producing a unique perspective on some of life's most important themes. Greg teaches whenever he can, enjoys swimming laps, and doesn't spend enough time at the Oregon coast.

Greg can be reached through the Contact form at [RethinkingScripture.com](http://RethinkingScripture.com).

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## Endnotes

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### Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Adam M Grant, *Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know*. (New York: Random House, 2021), 4.

<sup>2</sup> John H. Walton, *Old Testament Theology for Christians: From Ancient Context to Enduring Belief* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Grant, *Think Again*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Rachel H. Evans and J. Chu, *Wholehearted Faith* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2021), chapter 14.

### Chapter 1

<sup>5</sup> There was one vacation where this actually happened. I spent most of two whole days lying in a hammock in a resort in Mexico. I lived mostly on chips and salsa.

<sup>6</sup> You might not know it, but I'm a bit of a French scholar. I completed two years of French in high school. To this day, I can still count to ten (*un, deux, trois . . .*) at the drop of a chapeau!

<sup>7</sup> The seventh-day sabbath commandment is outlined in two different places: first in Exodus 20:8–11 and again in Deuteronomy 5:12–15. One might note that the two versions differ slightly on minor points.

<sup>8</sup> For a more robust view on the history of sabbath observance, I recommend Christopher John Donato, et al., *Perspectives on the Sabbath* (Nashville: B&H, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> This saying has a completely different meaning now that the world has experienced a pandemic!

<sup>10</sup> It's important here to note some confusion around this mention of the Old Testament character of Joshua. Several older English translations (Wycliff, Darby, Geneva, King James) translate this as "Jesus" instead of "Joshua." That's because the names we translate into English as "Jesus" and "Joshua" are actually the same Greek word. A similar situation also occurs in Acts 7:45. I'll discuss this in more detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>11</sup> I acknowledge that there are many different ways people read and understand the events of creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3. Our purpose here is not to try and settle any of those debates. They are great discussions to have, but we are here only to determine the quality and characteristics of the "rest" that God experienced.

<sup>12</sup> In my days as a youth pastor, I would have paused on this point just long enough to make everyone a little uncomfortable. Feel free to sit here for as long as you need.

<sup>13</sup> I like the term vicegerent (vice-jir-ent) over "vice-regent" or even "coregent." I believe it to be a more accurate descriptor for the relationship God originally set up with humanity. A "vicegerent" is the official administrative deputy of a ruler or head of state. It is comprised of *vice* (Latin for "in place of") and *gerere* (Latin for "to carry on, conduct"). This suggests that God is still present in the process, but has delegated a portion of His rule and authority to humanity.

<sup>14</sup> I'm borrowing much of the descriptive language in this section from the work of Dr. John H. Walton, who presents a much more scholarly account of these concepts in several places including, but not limited to: *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006); *The Lost*

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*World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate.* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009); and *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> It's on this point that the Bible's story of creation is dramatically different than seemingly similar extrabiblical stories. The Bible states that there is only one God that rules everything. There is no competition. In its day, this was a radical idea for those that held a pluralistic worldview. In this way, the biblical author uses this contrast to discount the pagan, polytheistic versions of creation.

<sup>16</sup> Maybe the most often-referenced of these stories is the Enuma Elish, a Babylonian creation myth that tells how the god Marduk rested (ruled) from a temple once the cosmos was established and ordered. For more see "Proposition 7, Divine Rest Is in a Temple," in Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 71.

<sup>17</sup> Here is Walton's longer statement for more context: "The difference is the piece of information that everyone knew in the ancient world and to which most modern readers are totally oblivious: Deity rests in a temple, and only in a temple. This is what temples were built for. We might even say that this is what a temple is—a place for divine rest. Perhaps even more significant, in some texts the construction of a temple is associated with cosmic creation. What does divine rest entail? Most of us think of rest as disengagement from the cares, worries and tasks of life. What comes to mind is sleeping in or taking an afternoon nap. But in the ancient world rest is what results when a crisis has been resolved or when stability has been achieved, when things have 'settled down.' Consequently, normal routines can be established and enjoyed. For deity this means that the normal operations of the cosmos can be undertaken. This is more a matter of engagement without obstacles rather than disengagement without responsibilities." Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 71–72.

<sup>18</sup> As Gregory Beale points out, "The prophet Ezekiel portrays Eden as being on a mountain (Ezek. 28:14, 16). Israel's temple was on Mount Zion (e.g., Exod. 15:17), and the end-time temple was to be located on a mountain (Ezek. 40:2; 43:12; Rev. 21:10)." G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, vol.17, D. A. Carson, ed. (Downers Grove, IL; England: InterVarsity Press; Apollos, 2004), 73.

<sup>19</sup> Several authors see this choice of words as theologically significant. According to Beale, "There may also be significance that the word used for God 'putting' Adam 'into the garden' in Genesis 2:15 is not the usual Hebrew word for 'put' (*šûm*) but is the word typically translated as 'to rest' (*nûah*). The selection of a word with overtones of 'rest' may indicate that Adam was to begin to reflect the sovereign rest of God." Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*. vol. 17, 69–70.

<sup>20</sup> Jon Collins and Tim Mackie discuss this use of *nuakh* in more detail in the BibleProject Podcast's Seventh-Day Rest series, Episode 3. There are fourteen episodes in this series. Every episode is worthy of close study. Jon Collins and Tim Mackie, "161. Two Kinds of Work – 7<sup>th</sup> Day Rest E3," BibleProject Podcast, October 28, 2019, 61:00, <https://bibleproject.com/podcast/two-kinds-work>.

<sup>21</sup> Walton suggests that the garden of Eden is best understood as the center of sacred space, the first temple. He proposes Adam and Eve were more than just gardeners, they were filling priestly roles in sacred space. Walton says it this way: "the point of caring for sacred space should be seen as much more than landscaping or even priestly duties. Maintaining order made one a participant with God in the ongoing task of sustaining the equilibrium God had established in the

cosmos.” John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015) 107.

<sup>22</sup> By the way, the carts at IKEA are amazing. All four wheels independently pivot 360 degrees. In the “world of carts,” their maneuverability is unmatched.

<sup>23</sup> Carman Joy Imes discusses several examples of liminality, some including sociological applications. She suggests liminality not only exists in doorways but also airports, wedding ceremonies, pregnancies, and colleges. According to Imes, “Few people actually enjoy liminality. We have an inborn desire to seek order and belonging and predictability.” Carman J. Imes, *Bearing God’s Name: Why Sinai Still Matters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019) 17.

<sup>24</sup> John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *The Lost World of the Torah: Law as Covenant and Wisdom in Ancient Context* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019). 113.

<sup>25</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, Vol. 17, 81–82.

<sup>26</sup> A point emphasized by these comments from Walton, “In verses 17–19 we are again faced with a curse, this time directed at the ground. What does it mean for the ground to be cursed? The verbal root used here (*’rr*) is recognized as the opposite of bless (*brk*). To bless someone is to put that person under God’s protection, enjoying God’s favor. To curse is to remove from God’s protection and favor. It does not mean putting a hex on something or changing its character or nature by magical or mystical means. It does not mean to bewitch or put a spell on something. . . . As a result of the ground being removed from God’s favor, protection, and blessing, it will yield its produce only through hard labor. . . . The impact of this curse is that, though food is still made available to people, it will be much harder to produce it.” John H. Walton, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 229.

<sup>27</sup> The same Hebrew word is used to describe Eve’s “pain” in childbirth and Adam’s “toil” eating from the land. English versions often choose to translate them differently, but they are the same Hebrew word. According to Walton, “The noun translated “pain” in the first line is . . . a word used only two other times in the Old Testament (Gen. 3:17; 5:29). Nouns from the same root . . . refer to pain, agony, hardship, worry, nuisance, and anxiety. The verbal root . . . occurs in a wide range of stems with a semantic range that primarily expresses grief and worry. What is important to note about this profile is that the root is not typically used to target physical pain, but mental or psychological anguish (though physical pain may accompany or be the root cause of the anguish). Walton, *Genesis*, 227.

<sup>28</sup> I give credit for this perspective to Dr. Gib Bennington, who taught a class for teachers called “Disrupting the Disruptor.”

<sup>29</sup> A point emphasized in these two passages. “Thus, says the LORD: Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?” (Isaiah 66:1); and “For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it” (Psalm 132:13–14). God’s restful rule is conducted in a throne room, which includes heaven and extends to the footstool of His earthly temple.

<sup>30</sup> John H. Walton, *Old Testament Theology for Christians: From Ancient Context to Enduring Belief* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 171.

## Chapter 2

<sup>31</sup> When I teach, I usually prefer 1980s movie references. I was so close with this one!

<sup>32</sup> I'm borrowing the use of "hyperlink" not only from the internet, but also from Jon Collins and Tim Mackie of BibleProject. They often use this term to suggest an intended connection between otherwise seemingly unrelated biblical texts and ideas.

<sup>33</sup> The biblical text actually describes the body of water that consumes Pharaoh as the "sea of reeds." Maps that suggest a path for the exodus are quite varied on its location. Some don't show the people crossing any water because scholars have not reached consensus about its location.

<sup>34</sup> The curse in Genesis 3:17 was placed on the land, not the people. This important distinction is highlighted by Walton this way, "In verses 17–19 we are again faced with a curse, this time directed at the ground. What does it mean for the ground to be cursed? The verbal root . . . is recognized as the opposite of bless. To bless someone is to put that person under God's protection, enjoying God's favor. To curse is to remove from God's protection and favor. It does not mean putting a hex on something or changing its character or nature by magical or mystical means. It does not mean to bewitch or put a spell on something." Walton, *Genesis*, 229.

<sup>35</sup> There seems to be a theme within Scripture where God deals more harshly with the initial lawbreakers, to show the gravity of the situation and to be an example for others. In Joshua 6–7, Achan and his family are exposed as the first breakers of the covenant within the conquest of the Promised Land. He and his (likely complicit) family are stoned, burned, and then covered with rocks (the same fate as the enemies of Israel in Jericho). In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira were the first to break from the new covenant after Pentecost. They both fell dead for lying to the Holy Spirit.

<sup>36</sup> Since these three feasts happen in rapid succession, sometimes all three are referred to by only mentioning the first, "Passover" (Luke 2:41; John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55); but at other times more detail is given (Mark 14:1; Luke 22:1).

<sup>37</sup> These feasts were linked back to the story of the exodus from slavery, which ultimately is a picture of the Israelites attempt to return to the function and order of the original creation.

<sup>38</sup> Sabbath rest for the land only applied to the land inside Israel's borders (Deuteronomy 15:3). It didn't apply to Jewish-owned land in foreign lands. The release of debts had similar restrictions. Loans to foreigners were not required to be released. These boundaries were just another reminder of Eden. A certain set of rules existed within its boundaries, but a different standard existed outside those borders.

<sup>39</sup> This description is not a foreshadowing literary device. We literally got married at night, in the middle of a snow and ice storm!

<sup>40</sup> John H. Walton, T. Longman III, and S. O. Moshier, *The Lost World of the Flood: Mythology, Theology, and the Deluge Debate* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 106.

<sup>41</sup> There are even questions about who the subject was. The painter was never able to figure out more than just his name. The painting is called *James Hunter Black Draftee (1965)*.

<sup>42</sup> This is a very platonic way of viewing God's end goal. We will discuss some of Plato's ideas in chapter 3, including his "world of the forms," that has contributed to the idea that our final resting place will be in the heavens, instead of the new earth.

## Chapter 4

<sup>43</sup> Augustine of Hippo, "The Confessions of St. Augustin," in *The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustin with a Sketch of His Life and Work*, vol. 1, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-

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Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. G. Pilkington (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 45.

<sup>44</sup> Some of the concepts and examples in this section were inspired by the BibleProject Podcast series Image of God. In that series, Jon Collins and Tim Mackie discuss many other aspects and intricacies of image bearing not mentioned here. Jon Collins and Tim Mackie, “Image of God,” BibleProject Podcast Series, February/March 2016, <https://bibleproject.com/podcast/series/image-of-god-series>.

<sup>45</sup> Sometimes this presents itself in the suggestion that the Law must be segmented into three categories: civil laws, ceremonial laws, and moral laws. It’s often thought that the civil and ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law shouldn’t apply to New Testament believers, but that the moral aspects of the Law should apply today. While these are good discussions to have, understanding the Mosaic Law in this way encourages people to approach the text compartmentally. It dramatically decreases a reader’s ability to study the interconnected themes of the entire biblical text (Old and New Testaments).

<sup>46</sup> I still remember the revelation I experienced when the Old Testament practice of animal sacrifice was connected to Jesus’ role as the Lamb (one of the Old Testament sacrificial animals) of God.

<sup>47</sup> According to Howard and Rosenthal, “Yom Kippur was designated by the Lord as a day in which ‘you shall afflict your souls’ (Lev 23:27, 32). By definition this was understood to mean fasting (cf. Ezra 8:21). It was a day devoted to fasting and repenting of one’s sins during the past year. The Israelite who failed to devote himself to fasting and repentance on Yom Kippur was to be ‘cut off from his people’ (Lev. 23:29). Yom Kippur was also a day with prohibitions against all forms of work.” Kevin Howard and Marvin Rosenthal. *The Feasts of the Lord: God’s Prophetic Calendar from Calvary to the Kingdom* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 120.

<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, at least one time this goat wandered back into camp . . . which really ruined the picture that they were trying to paint. Can you imagine seeing all your sins literally walking back into town? They eventually changed the custom and began shoving the scapegoat down a steep mountain to ensure its death.

<sup>49</sup> In John 1:29, John the Baptist sees Jesus and says to those who were with him, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!” This idea of “taking away sins” is a [hyperlink back to the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement](#).

<sup>50</sup> These points are illustrated as a chiasmus, a common way authors of Greek literature structured their writing. It follows a pattern where parallel elements correspond in an inverted order (i.e., A-B-C-C’-B’-A’, usually with the author’s main point placed in the center position (in the example the letters C and C’ is in the center). I often look for creative ways to display this ancient structure. For some of my Bible studies, my weekly choice of shirts followed a chiastic pattern. I know, I need some help.

<sup>51</sup> Many of the ideas presented in this section come from Chip Bennett and Warren Gage’s Christian understanding of Greek philosophic ideas and Plato’s *Republic*. I recommend the following resource for those interested in understanding more about philosophy’s influence on the way the gospel was originally communicated in a Roman world: Chip Bennett and Warren Gage, *CS321 Introduction to Plato’s Republic: A Christian Reading*, Logos Mobile Education (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019).

<sup>52</sup> If you've taken a philosophy class, you might have studied this. It is possibly the most famous of Plato's examples and is found in Book VII of *The Republic*.

<sup>53</sup> That is, at least since the Tower of Babel events discussed in Genesis 11:1–9.

<sup>54</sup> This is not limited to the idea of shadows and forms. Another well-known example is found in the first chapter of John's gospel. The disciple begins his gospel with this statement, "In the beginning was the Logos (Greek for "Word"), and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God." Later in the same chapter he writes, "And the Logos became flesh and tabernacled among us" (John 1:14). Plato and other philosophers had previously discussed the existence of a nonphysical divine reason implicit in the cosmos which gives it order, form, and meaning. The title they gave this philosophic concept was the *Logos* (which in Greek can mean "word," "reason," or "plan"). In the introduction to John's gospel, he uses this well-established philosophic idea of the Logos, combines it with language that mimics the Jewish creation account ("In the beginning") to describe Jesus, the Logos who came from the unseen realm, became flesh, and tabernacles among humanity. John's ability to set this multicultural hook early in His gospel most certainly contributed to the spread of the gospel in the first-century Hellenistic world.

<sup>55</sup> Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, trans. with notes and interpretive essay by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 199.

<sup>56</sup> Plato suggested there could be someone who was completely righteous or "just". He also concluded that such a "just man" would end up being, "whipped; he'll be racked; he'll be bound; he'll have both of his eyes burned out; and, at the end, when he has undergone every sort of evil, he'll be crucified." Plato, *The Republic*, 39.

## Chapter 4

<sup>57</sup> Thanks to Dr. Leah Payne for providing this analogy which highlights the significance of this cultural phenomenon.

<sup>58</sup> Movies like *Lucas* (1986) and *Can't Buy Me Love* (1987) featured the slow clap. As a result, these types of scenes were also masterfully mocked in the 2001 spoof *Not Another Teen Movie*.

<sup>59</sup> Matthew leads all other gospel writers by mentioning the "fulfillment" of prophecy fourteen times (Matthew 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 3:15; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:54, 56; and 27:9).

<sup>60</sup> The Hebrew Bible is referred to as the TaNaKh, which is an acronym made from these three main sections into which the Hebrew scriptures are organized. The "T" stands for Torah which refers to the first five books. This section is also be referred to as the Law (of Moses). The N refers to Nevi'im, the Hebrew word for Prophets. The K represents the Ketuvim, which means "Writings" and contains the Psalms, other poetry, and some random other books that didn't fit into the first two groupings. This is the organization to which Jesus is referring when He describes the Scriptures as the "Law and Prophets and Psalms."

<sup>61</sup> There are at least two other things going on in this passage that are worthy of mention. First, according to Tim Mackie of the Bible Project, Jesus seems to insert an extra line, from Isaiah 58:6, into His quote of Isaiah 61. The line from chapter 58, "To set free those who are oppressed," is in the context of the seventh-day sabbath. Mackie suggests that by combining this seventh-day sabbath context (Isaiah 58) with the Jubilee passage (Isaiah 61), Jesus is suggesting those two passages are really talking about the same thing: the ministry of rest that Jesus has

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come to fulfill. Jon Collins, and Tim Mackie, “169. Jesus and His Jubilee Mission – 7<sup>th</sup> Day Rest E11,” BibleProject Podcast, December 16, 2019, 75:00, <https://bibleproject.com/podcast/jesus-and-his-jubilee-mission>.

Second, Jesus seems to end His Scripture reading in the middle of a sentence. Isaiah 61:2 reads, “To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God.” Jesus quotes the language regarding the “favorable year of the Lord,” but then stops and does not mention the “day of vengeance of our God” that concludes the sentence in Isaiah. It may be that Jesus fulfilled the “favorable year of the Lord” ministry in His first coming, and that the “day of vengeance of our God” may refer to events associated with another time.

<sup>62</sup> This verb, in the Greek manuscripts, is in the perfect tense, which means Jesus’ fulfillment is a past completed action which has ongoing present implications. Here, at the very beginning of His public ministry, Jesus is saying that He has already fulfilled the ultimate Jubilee.

<sup>63</sup> Jesus also speaks to this fulfillment in Matthew 11:2–6 when John the Baptist sends messengers to Jesus asking if he is the One they have come to expect from the Old Testament prophecies. Jesus sends word back to John from this same Isaiah passage. They report to John that the sick and lame are being brought back to full functionality and “the poor have the gospel preached to them” (Matthew 11:5).

<sup>64</sup> Some, more recent studies have suggested that people don’t necessarily learn best by emphasizing one preferred learning style. So, the early theories about learning styles are probably not as accurate as researchers once thought. It turns out that people likely learn best by employing a variety of styles into their study habits.

<sup>65</sup> Consider Paul’s description of this situation in his letter to the Galatians. He suggests Christ’s ministry is to set humanity free from the yoke of slavery to sin: “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1). But freedom from that yoke only allows someone to be attached to another. This choice between “two yokes” is the same message we saw in Jeremiah. Humanity is always yoked to something—either the rule of slavery to sin, or to the rule of God.

<sup>66</sup> There were provisions within God’s revelation that ensured that the roles of the king and the priest would remain separate. The priests were only from the tribe of Levi, while the kingly line (first from Saul’s tribe of Benjamin) would eventually follow David’s line from within the tribe of Judah.

<sup>67</sup> Carman J. Imes, *Bearing God’s Name: Why Sinai Still Matters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 145.

<sup>68</sup> The gospel of John supports this claim many times: first, by telling us that, during his earthly ministry, Jesus “tabernacled” among us (John 1:14). Jesus further downplays the ministry of the temple in Jerusalem when He tells a woman at a well in Samaria, “and hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father” (John 4:21).

<sup>69</sup> Let’s remember the connection Jesus has with the creation event (see John 1:1–3).

<sup>70</sup> By stating this, I don’t claim to understand what it is that sheep are supposed to do.

<sup>71</sup> The Greek word describing the man’s hand literally means “dry”—like a dry and withered plant.

<sup>72</sup> A truth not only found in Scripture, but also in junior high English classes across the country!

## Chapter 5

<sup>73</sup> Interestingly, there are three times Ἰησοῦς is translated as “Lord” for sake of translational clarity (Luke 10:39; John 4:1; Jude 5).

<sup>74</sup> Karen H. Jobes is one of the best of the current scholars in this field of study. I’d like to thank her for her time, expertise, and willingness to personally explain many of the nuances found in Hebrews 3–4. For a good introduction to Septuagint studies, one should read Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva. *Invitation to the Septuagint*, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015).

<sup>75</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *Letters to the Church: A Survey of Hebrews and the General Epistles* (Zondervan, 2011), 67.

<sup>76</sup> I’ve unpacked some of the linguistic nuances at play between Hebrews 3–4, Psalm 95, and Exodus 17 in my doctoral project, “Beyond the Sabbath’s Shadow; A Biblical Understanding and Application of Godly Rest.” If you are interested in that sort of study, a copy is available at [RethinkingRest.com](http://RethinkingRest.com). You could be one of the few people to ever lay eyes on that project! The list includes a handful of professors, my family, and a guy at my church named Frank!

<sup>77</sup> Cross-references are really helpful links to related Scripture passages that some printed Bibles include (either in the middle column or sometimes at the bottom of the page). An online search for “Bible cross-references” will suggest several free electronic options of the same.

<sup>78</sup> As the fictitious news anchor, Ron Burgundy, might say.

## Chapter 6

<sup>79</sup> The events in the beginning of Exodus are much more interesting than going through a class syllabus. I’ll never forget the first time I taught a “pandemic class” with students over video conferencing. As I was making my way through the class syllabus, one of the students said, very loudly, “This class is sooo boring! All he’s doing is reading through the syllabus.” One of my students had forgotten to mute her microphone, walked away from her computer, and began talking to her roommate. Unfortunately, her assessment was accurate! That particular class was terribly boring.

<sup>80</sup> This point was first introduced to me by my professor Dr. Gary Derickson. It was in his class that I began my exploration into the topic of biblical rest.

<sup>81</sup> This reminds me of another story. In 1 Kings 17–19 Elijah has a showdown with several hundred prophets of pagan gods. After the Lord comes through in big and dramatic ways, Elijah fears for his life and flees the entire length of the land. He ultimately ends up severely depressed and in a cave on Mt. Sinai. He listens for God’s voice in the loudness of the strong wind, a massive earthquake, and a raging fire, but the Lord’s message was not in any of those. Then the text says there was “a sound of a gentle blowing” (1 Kings 19:12), The King James Version translated it as the more familiar “a still small voice.” Literally, the Hebrew words are “voice,” “silence,” and “thin”—or, a voice of thin silence. One of my tour guides in Israel, Dr. Halvor Ronning of the Home for Bible Translators and Scholars in Jerusalem, explained it like this: “If we had been there in the cave with a tape recorder, it would have just been silent.” Dr. Ronning said this story introduced the idea of “thin silence.” In an utterly silent moment when Elijah is absolutely desperate and wishing he could die; it says the silence got “thin.” Somehow God’s presence was there in the silence and penetrated the silence. It was so powerful that Elijah got up out of his despair and was able to continue his ministry. Halvor Ronning, personal communication, 2006.

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<sup>82</sup> It's likely that this water was more than just bitter to the taste. This description is likely a warning that the water would cause one to get sick, or possibly even kill those who consumed it. That would certainly leave a bitter taste in one's mouth!

<sup>83</sup> According to Dr. Warren Gage, this story is one of many third-day references in the Old Testament that prefigure the resurrection of Jesus. He suggests that, like Jesus' story, there are several stories in the Old Testament where someone survives a "death-like experience" on the third day. This story in Exodus 15 may have been one of the stories Jesus recounted to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35). W. A. Gage and L. G. Gage, *The Road to Emmaus: A Walk with a Stranger from Jerusalem* (Fort Lauderdale: St. Andrews House, 2012). Dr. Gage has also depicted several of these stories in professionally animated short videos at [www.WatermarkGospel.com](http://www.WatermarkGospel.com).

<sup>84</sup> This reminds me of Job's story in the Old Testament. Job lost everything he owned and his entire family died. Through this process Job is conflicted and he asks God for an answer for why he is being treated this way. Then God gives a lengthy response (Job 38:1–42:2) where He explains the complexity of the organization of the cosmos. From Job's point of view, things seem unjust, but from God's perspective Job is a small part of complex creation and there is no way he can understand from this how everything works with his limited view. What's Job's answer? "I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (Job 42:3).

<sup>85</sup> This name was transliterated from the Hebrew word of the same sound. It has nothing to do with the English meaning of sin. It's just a place name. The mountain in this area (Sinai) is a deviation of the same.

<sup>86</sup> Some see the Israelites decision at Kadesh Barnea, when they sent the twelve spies into the land, as the event that prevented their entrance. But the decision made at Kadesh Barnea was reflective of the hardness they first developed at Meribah and Massah, the first time they tested God.

<sup>87</sup> Some commentators try and lump the two episodes together and explain them as the same event.

<sup>88</sup> These stories are mentioned in each of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Those gospels are called "synoptic" because the majority of their content is similar (like the English word "synonym"). In contrast, the fourth gospel (John) contains largely different content.

<sup>89</sup> Examples of "Moses typology" are seen throughout the New Testament. Complete works have been written suggesting a pervasive attempt by the New Testament authors (and the early church) to connect the ministries of Moses and Jesus. In his work, Dale C. Allison summarizes the typology this way: "of all the Jewish figures with whom Jesus is implicitly or explicitly compared in Christian literature of the first few centuries, Moses, both in terms of frequency and significance, holds pride of place." Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthew Typology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013).

<sup>90</sup> This is also a link back to the forty days and nights of fasting that Moses experienced on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 34:28).

<sup>91</sup> Luke 4:2 says that Jesus was "tempted by the devil." A more literal translation would say He was "put to the test by the devil." Does that sound familiar at all? Maybe it brings the story of Adam and Eve to mind? They too were tested by the devil in a garden. But they failed the test, and were removed from God's rest.

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<sup>92</sup> To further clarify between the two Meribah events, the Bible sometimes describes the episode from Numbers 20 as “Meribah-kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin” (Numbers 27:14; Deuteronomy 32:51).

## Chapter 7

<sup>93</sup> Here is the larger quote where Calvin discusses the disciples’ response to Jesus’ miraculous feeding of the thousands: “And certainly, it was shameful ingratitude that, after having seen bread created out of nothing, and in such abundance as to satisfy many thousands of men, and after having seen this done twice, they are now anxious about bread, as if their Master did not always possess the same power. From these words we infer that all who have once or twice experienced the power of God, and distrust it for the future are convinced of unbelief; for it is faith that cherishes in our hearts the remembrance of the gifts of God, and faith must have been laid asleep, if we allow them to be forgotten. John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol. 32: Matthew, Mark and Luke, Part II*, trans. John King (1847–50), Comment on Matthew 16:8, <https://sacred-texts.com/chr/calvin/cc32/cc32051.htm>.

<sup>94</sup> Yes, this a nod to Liam Neeson’s character in the movie *Taken*.

<sup>95</sup> David Brooks, *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life* (New York: Random House, 2019), 89–93.

<sup>96</sup> Bob Goff, Twitter, March 20, 2021, <https://twitter.com/bobgoff/status/1373478395330273283?lang=en>.

<sup>97</sup> There have been many debates about how to properly understand and apply the “warning passages” found in Hebrews 2:1-4; 4:12-13; 6:4-8; and 10:26-31. Are these warnings given to true believers, nonbelievers, or some combination of the two? For a good historical perspective, I would suggest reading H. W. Bateman IV, ed., *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2007).

<sup>98</sup> According to Gary W. Derickson, “In the book of Numbers (after Kadish-Barneia) God does not desert Israel. Chapter fourteen is followed by chapter fifteen. God encouraged the Israelites to teach their children about the sacrifices that they would perform in the promised land. He continued to provide for the Israelites in the wilderness. God gave them covering and food up until the day they entered the promised land. The author is not talking about losing their salvation . . . just their rest.” Gary W. Derickson, “The Book of Hebrews,” New Testament Survey (class lecture, Oregon Theological Seminary, 2006).

<sup>99</sup> I realize that this comparison places Tacoma, Washington as the symbolic equivalent of Egypt. Let me just say, Tacoma really was a great place to live!

## Afterword

<sup>100</sup> Curtis Zackery, *Soul Rest: Reclaim Your Life; Return to Sabbath*, eds. A. Stocker, J. Marr, L. Smoyer, and C. Callahan (Bellingham, WA: Kirkdale Press, 2018), 31.