

RETHINKING

Rest

WHY OUR APPROACH TO
SABBATH
ISN'T WORKING

BY
GREGORY D. HALL

Deep River
B O O K S

“Hall provides a wonderful exploration of a question at the heart of the biblical story—what does it look like for the world, and humanity, to be at rest?”

—Jon Collins, Cofounder
BibleProject

“Our contemporary culture has no idea what it means to experience the rest God intended. What’s even more tragic is this—Christians have also lost their way. Gregory Hall invites us to rethink the meaning of ‘Sabbath rest.’ He rightly contends that God offers us something far beyond a lazy Sunday in a hammock. This book delivers a robust and fully developed biblical concept of the rest God intended for his children. The truths are not only profound, they are life-changing and full of grace.”

—Morris Dirks, Founding Director
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“We live in a tired world. What people really need is a clear understanding of true rest. Hall offers this clarity by relating the Bible’s ancient Near Eastern context to the biblical story. Then he helps us practically apply Jesus’s offer of rest to our modern context. Many teachers write about sabbath today, but this work stands alone as truly unique in its approach and application.”

—Chip Bennett, Lead Pastor
Grace Community Church, Sarasota, Florida

Rethinking Rest: Why Our Approach to Sabbath Isn't Working

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FOREWORD

What does it mean for God to “rest” (Genesis 2:2–3) and what does commandment four mean when it indicates that people should somehow be part of that “rest” (Exodus 20:8–11)? What did Sabbath observance require for the Israelites? Were the Jews of Jesus’s time reading it correctly? How do Jesus’s statements about the Sabbath enhance our understanding? What does Jesus mean when he offers to give “rest” (Matthew 11:28)? Should Christians be concerned about Sabbath observance today?

So many questions! These are all legitimate inquiries and concern interpretation of Scripture, understanding the ancient world, theological issues, and correlating Old Testament and New Testament, as well as considering modern appropriation and practice.

Some Christians have developed extreme lists of requirements for observing Sabbath; others happily dismiss it as part of the Law that should be considered obsolete. Stepping into this flurry of confusion, Gregory D. Hall here leads us through a careful and insightful study of the issues. He offers sure-handed guidance through the murky waters that so often bog us down as we seek to understand God’s Word on this important and debated topic.

Combining the use of storytelling and careful textual work, Hall helps us to reevaluate many of the preconceptions about Sabbath that readers often have. In the process, he helps us reimagine what the Church is and does, and how we, as Christians, should understand our place in God’s plans and purposes.

If Christians can absorb Hall's ideas and put them into practice, they will find themselves freed from the tyranny that their presuppositions have imposed on them. They will be able to appropriate the essential truth of what it means when God rests as well as to regain an understanding of the rest that God offers to his people and to which he calls them. I do not believe that I am overstating when I suggest that this book can revolutionize your thinking about God, the Bible, the Church, and your own relationship with God.

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Additional Online Resources



RethinkingRest.com

At the beginning of each chapter, you'll see the "Additional Resources" QR code. This code links you to RethinkingRest.com, where you will find free companion resources for the *Rethinking Rest* book. These resources are available for individual and/or small group use.

Suggestions for Scripture Pre-Reading

Bible Lessons

Discussion Questions

Teaching Videos/Audio

Author's Q&R Forum

Suggestions for Additional Study

Electronic Endnotes

INTRODUCTION

I'm wondering why you picked up this book about "rest." Of all the subjects available, and all the things people are studying and learning these days, what caused you to open this one just now? What's going on in your life that brought you here?

Let me guess. You're tired.

You've got low energy.

Your motivation is not what it used to be, and before you go to the doctor and get a pill to fix it, you thought you'd read a . . .

(Sorry, now I'm projecting. Those are some of my issues.)

Whatever your reasoning, this book will challenge you to rethink your concept of rest. Would you expect anything less from something so titled? And your timing is exceptional, because "rethinking" seems to be in vogue. The information age is hurling unprecedented levels of previously unknown data at humanity at a blinding pace. This onslaught of information has caused us to reexamine many previously well-established conclusions. For instance, I grew up thinking Pluto was not only a lovable cartoon character but also a planet in our solar system. It's "new information" that has caused us to rethink some of our celestial assumptions.

Adam Grant, author of *Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know*, suggests that the ability to rethink well-established ideas is an important skill set. But it's not always our favorite thing to do. There are deeply seated reasons behind our resistance to rethinking.

According to Grant, “we often prefer the ease of hanging on to old views over the difficulty of grappling with new ones. Yet there are also deeper forces behind our resistance to rethinking. Questioning ourselves makes the world more unpredictable. It requires us to admit that the facts may have changed, that what was once right may now be wrong. Reconsidering something we believe deeply can threaten our identities, making it feel as if we’re losing a part of ourselves.”¹

This may be one reason why “new information” isn’t always welcomed into the church. One might think, if God doesn’t change, why would we need to rethink well-established ideas? But those committed to thoroughly understanding the Bible have always been willing to consider new information, and in the last hundred years much has been unearthed that’s worthy of further study. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (1947–56) is but one example of “new information” within the last century that has given scholars much to rethink.

At the same time, it’s important to remember that this process of discovery and consideration does not require one to abandon well-established theology. In his book *Old Testament Theology for Christians*, John H. Walton suggests, “Rethinking interpretation of a particular passage need not be viewed as undermining larger theological issues.”²

In this book I will challenge you to reconsider several assumptions you may have regarding biblical rest. I’ll ask you to expand your definitions to include things you may not have previously considered. But be assured, my purposes are not to undermine God’s rest. I only wish to bring clarity to the topic.

Everyone seems to have well-established ideas of what rest is. There is even a culture war, between society and religion, to define the concept. But when pushed to clearly define the stuff of rest, it is often an exercise of smoke and mirrors. The harder we try to define rest, the less of it we all seem to have. This book will help change that. It will consider new information and give new categories to our data.

Grant points out the double standard society has regarding rethinking: “We laugh at people who still use Windows 95, yet we still cling to

opinions that we formed in 1995. We listen to views that make us feel good, instead of ideas that make us think hard.”³ In regard to biblical rest, this book is all about the latter, and not so much the former.

I grew up playing baseball. There was a strong Little League tradition in our small Pacific Northwest community. One of the years I was in middle school (in the early 1980s), our local high-school baseball team made it to the playoffs. Most of the postseason games that year were played on weekdays after school, but the championship game happened to be scheduled for a Saturday afternoon. Normally this is a great idea. It allows teams and families time to travel and for the community to fully support their athletes.

That particular year, one of the best pitchers on the team (and his family) consistently observed a seventh-day sabbath. His family took Saturdays off from many of their normal weekday activities for religious purposes. As the team kept winning their playoff games, I remember there being great conversation in the community about whether the star pitcher would choose to play if they made it to the championship game. The team did keep winning, and they qualified to play that Saturday afternoon. After much discussion (and I’m assuming prayerful consideration as well), the pitcher decided to play in the title game. Even though they lost a close one-run contest that day, the conversation surrounding the decision to play, or not, made an early impact on my idea of the sabbath.

That baseball season was just a couple years after the movie *Chariots of Fire* won four Academy Awards (including Best Picture). For those who haven’t seen it, *Chariots of Fire* is a film based on the true story of two British Olympic athletes in the 1924 games. One of the athletes, Eric Liddell, was favored to win the 100-meter race. Liddell was a devoutly religious man, and refused to run in a qualifying heat because it was held on Sunday.

Though I was young at the time, I remember being somewhat confused about how many different ideas and practices there were regarding this sacred concept. One athlete refuses to run on Sunday; another doesn’t know if he should play baseball on Saturday. These ambiguities,

and many others like them, have led to a general state of confusion for many. It's common for followers of Jesus to second-guess what the sabbath is and how they should respond to it.

Although rest is an ancient idea, it has found its way into modern culture in various forms. And it's not just for those that go to church anymore! Even secular society, lost somewhere between sleepless nights and chaotic schedules, has a somewhat romantic idea of what rest might mean. "Taking a sabbatical" has a nice ring to it. Some might think it's just another way to talk about a vacation. But few find the place where the roads cross, where the "theory of rest" meets the opportunity in life. If there were ever a time where resting was both countercultural and spiritually needed, it is now.

I think we can all agree that biblical rest is a confusing topic. It has been for me, and I don't think I'm alone. I grew up attending church, and one might think church attendance would bring more clarity, but it was in church that I found the greatest diversity regarding rest.

The author Rachel Held Evans suggests that the evangelical culture has failed to develop a robust theology of rest or of sabbath. And she is careful to separate "rest" and "sabbath," to stress the point that "all sabbath is rest, but not all rest is sabbath."⁴

Most within evangelicalism have assumed rest was simply one variation or another of observing the weekly sabbath (the fourth commandment). For years, that's what I assumed too.

My early confusion led to apathy and eventually, even though I remained a believer in Christ, I lost interest in the sabbath. It was later in life, while in my master's program, that I began to reengage with the topic. As I studied the book of Hebrews, I began to ask new questions about biblical rest. Those questions, and the answers that followed, led me to a surprising discovery, a greater understanding, and the desire to share my findings on this topic.

So to begin, let's ask these questions: What day is the sabbath? How do you interact with the concept of rest? How does rest influence your life on a weekly or even monthly basis?

I've asked many people these questions, and they've responded in dramatically different ways. Most of them fit into five similar categories that we will briefly discuss in the first chapter. My guess is that your response would fit into one of these categories as well. But this book isn't meant to settle arguments about what day the sabbath is, what activities are approved, or which ones should be avoided on such a day.

Rather, let's have a biblical discussion about godly rest. I propose we start at the beginning, Genesis, and hop and skip our way through the story of God and His creation. We will see that the idea of rest plays a surprisingly large and ever-expanding role in the overall biblical story. The mistake most of us make is when we allow our idea of large biblical concepts to develop out of just one or two Bible passages. Instead, we'll see that the context of each individual passage is really best understood from within a "forest for the trees" perspective. It's this broad context that will speak most loudly to much of the sabbath confusion.

In addition to examining the larger context of "rest," we will also try to answer some relevant questions you might be asking, like:

Why is it that God rested on the seventh day of creation? (I thought He was all-powerful.)

How is humanity's rest related to God's rest?

Is the sabbath always on a particular day of the week?

How does God define work?

Can someone piece together a sabbath experience in several short bursts throughout the week?

Does God expect believers today to practice sabbath?

How might all this relate to the ministry of Jesus and what He had to say about rest?

These are all good questions and we will discuss both theological and practical responses to each—and many more you probably haven't even considered yet.

Whatever your motivation is for reading this book, I'm guessing you wouldn't refuse if someone offered you a satisfying recipe for rest and a compelling argument to rethink what it means. The concepts I lay out in the following chapters have completely changed the way I approach biblical rest. Not only have my definitions changed, but so have the practical ways I pursue rest.

Biblical rest is a large part of God's story, but the church today is largely missing the breadth, depth, and beauty of Christ's easy yoke. So, no matter where you find yourself on the sabbath spectrum, I hope to awaken dormant interests, stretch established ideas, and bring new perspectives to the often-ignored offer of "biblical rest."

I invite you to turn the page and join me on the journey.



CHAPTER 1

WHY RETHINK REST?

I don't know if you've noticed, but rest isn't working.

I'm not trying to say that the definition of rest is "not working." I mean: the concept of rest today is broken.

Humanity is a big group of tired people, and rest is proving to be more elusive than anyone ever imagined. As with most complex topics, people have come to very different conclusions about rest. Our ideas have become fractured and splintered to the point where most people don't really know what it is or how to get it. We are tired, and we have no idea how rest should interact with our exhaustion.

I'll use myself as an example. It seems like I'm tired most of the time. Sometimes I'm physically tired. At other times I'm mentally or emotionally exhausted—or all of these at once! I used to think that all I needed was a vacation. I often romanticized the idea. I was sure "the dream vacation" would include the ingredients to restore my soul. My wife Lisa and I would decide on a destination, negotiate the time off work, and buy the tickets. I imagined lying in a hammock under a

palm tree on a beach somewhere.⁵ I was sure that was where I would find rest.

But here's how my vacations usually play out: After getting to the destination, it takes me about two days to unhitch from regular life. About four days in, I start getting the uneasy feeling that I should be getting back home. When it actually is time to return, that "travel day" returning home is usually exhausting. After we arrive back, unpack, and get ready to head off to work, I often feel more tired than before I left.

Please tell me I'm not alone here!

That "vacation" idea of rest can't be the answer we're all looking for. It's so temporary. It's so fleeting. It's so *expensive*!

So, where else should we look to sort out the mess of our unrest?

Many look to the Bible to fix what is broken. You might be one of those. It's a good place to look, because the Bible has much to say about rest—it is first mentioned in the story of the creation in Genesis, and the idea is woven all through the Old and New Testaments. With all that the Bible offers regarding rest, I'd like to think those who regularly read the Bible would have better "rest success" than those who don't. But I don't think that's true. I think Christ-followers are often just as confused as everyone else.

Part of the problem is that we've truncated the idea. What do I mean? "Sabbath" is the word Bible-believers might use if pressed to define "rest." But the weekly sabbath is only a small subcategory of rest. Rest is a robust and fully developed biblical concept. Godly rest is so much more than the weekly sabbath.

We've Made the Sabbath into a Cul-de-sac Conversation

I think most people are familiar with the idea of a cul-de-sac. It's a type of street that dead-ends. It has a place to turn around, but it is not a through road. There's no exit other than going back from where you came.

We English speakers borrowed "cul-de-sac" from the French.⁶ It's a term that literally means "the bottom of the bag." Like when you put your hand in a bag of potato chips and get to the bottom (because you've eaten

all of them). You just got “cul-de-sac-ed” (that’s not French; I just made that up) because there’s no place to go but back to the top of the bag.

That’s what sabbath conversations have become in the church today. They are cul-de-sac conversations. They don’t have any outlets. Let me explain what I mean.

There are so many different ideas about what sabbath might be that people rarely get past a simple definition of the term. Most people think sabbath is really only about the fourth commandment,⁷ but the fourth commandment is only a small sliver of what the Bible says about sabbath, and most churchgoers can’t even agree what that commandment means. Following are some of the contemporary views based on interpretations of this commandment.

Friday Night to Saturday Night: We know the seventh-day sabbath in the Old Testament was a twenty-four-hour period of time beginning at sunset on Friday night. Some people in the church think Christians should return to a sabbath observance that mimics this Old Testament commandment.

Sunday’s the Day: Some Bible readers notice in the New Testament that the church would gather on Sunday. These folks would argue that Saturday was the old covenant sabbath, but that Christians today are under a new covenant and that the example is to observe sabbath on Sunday.

Any Day . . . or Part of Any Day: Others think there’s nothing special about one day over any other. They think God has given us more flexibility than that in the new covenant. They would say God doesn’t really care what day it is. In fact, a Christian might even be able to piece-meal parts of days together throughout the week to fulfill the sabbath idea.

Christ Is the Sabbath: Others look at some of the statements that Jesus made regarding rest and conclude that the idea of sabbath is really just something that points to Jesus’s ministry. But what does that even mean? While it sounds like a good “church answer,” this type of view is really hard to pin down and seems to lack “boots on the ground” practicality.

Those are just some of the ways people pursue defining the sabbath.⁸ Because of the diversity in opinions, our modern-day conversations have made the sabbath a theological cul-de-sac. We open up the topic, and we think we're heading down "Sabbath Street," but we get so caught up on how to even define the term that we find ourselves at the bottom of the bag with nowhere to go. People get stuck in debates about what day it should be observed, or what types of things people should be doing on those days. There's no exit out of those conversations; they don't lead anywhere else.

In reality, the topic of biblical rest is a neighborhood of highly interconnected streets. And when we are able to back away from our current cul-de-sac conversation and see the whole neighborhood of rest, that's when we can begin to understand what God means when He offers "rest."

I Don't Think That Means What You Think It Means

One of my favorite movies is the 1987 film *The Princess Bride*. Many of the actors from that film have gone on to have long and successful careers. For several of them, this was the film that propelled them forward. It is also a movie that has provided many memorable one-liners, like:

"People in masks cannot be trusted."⁹

"Never get involved in a land war in Asia."

"Mawwiage is what brings us together today."

Once, in a wedding I was officiating, I began the ceremony with this "mawwiage" line from the movie's wedding scene. It was received with a few isolated snickers in the audience, and a big smile from the groom. I enjoy trying to recite quotable movie lines in everyday circumstances, just to see who might notice.

One character in the movie, Vizzini, a "Sicilian man of genius," has a favorite word: "inconceivable." He says it quite often. In fact, he says it so often that he ends up using it in ways that are contrary to the word's meaning. At one point in the movie Vizzini thought he had killed the story's main character by cutting the rope he was utilizing to scale the

“Cliffs of Insanity.” When Vizzini sees that his foe hasn’t died, but is clinging to the side of the cliff, Vizzini uses his favorite word to describe the situation.

“Inconceivable!”

Another character, after having heard Vizzini use this word several times throughout the movie, responds, “You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.”

I think some of us have gotten to exactly that point in our conversations about biblical rest. We use the term . . . but I don’t think it means what we think it means. So let’s get out of the cul-de-sac, come back to the Bible, and start at the beginning. I propose we build our perspective on the whole of the biblical narrative. We will see how the Bible begins with a creation at rest in Eden under God’s rule and authority. We will see how that rest was disrupted and how God pursues His creation to reestablish restful rule.

The purpose of this study is to better understand biblical rest and to be able to negotiate the neighborhood well enough to arrive where God desires us all to land: in a place of true rest.

There Remains a Sabbath Rest

We could begin our trip through the biblical “neighborhood of rest” at the creation, in Genesis, and weave our way all the way through to the end of the story in Revelation. We will make our way back to Genesis soon enough, but I’d like to begin in the book of Hebrews. This is by design. There’s a pivotal discussion in Hebrews 3–4 regarding the New Testament understanding of biblical rest. This discussion is unique because it directly connects the rest a believer experiences to the rest that God experiences. This connection is foundational if we are going to begin to rethink what rest is.

We are not going to look at that whole passage now. We’re just going to begin using it as a base camp from which to start our journey. There’s a specific passage in Hebrews 4 that will launch us back to the beginning of the story in Genesis.

Is sabbath rest really a concept on which modern believers need to focus? Let's consider what the author of Hebrews has to say:

For if Joshua¹⁰ had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. 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. (Hebrews 4:8–11)

This passage mentions the Old Testament character of Joshua. Joshua was Moses's right-hand man. Moses led Israel out of Egypt, received the Ten Commandments, and led the people for a generation in the wilderness. Then Joshua went on to lead the Israelites into the land that God had promised to Israel's ancestor, Abraham. The Promised Land, into which Joshua led the conquest, is often referred to as a place of rest.

Hebrews 4:8 suggests that if Joshua had given the Israelites true rest (through the conquest of the Promised Land), He (God) would not have spoken of another day after the conquest, when the concept of rest was revisited.

There's something important to notice here. In maybe the most important conversation about biblical rest in the whole of the New Testament, we're talking about Joshua. But who are we *not* talking about?

Notice the absence of Moses in this discussion. Moses is the character most closely associated with the Old Testament rules about how to observe the weekly sabbath day. Yet the author of Hebrews doesn't go back and suggest that the fourth commandment was the defining path to sabbath rest. In fact, the author doesn't mention any part of the Mosaic Law in his argument. But that's where our cul-de-sac conversations are on this topic in church culture today. We go to the fourth commandment and get stuck there.

Instead, this Hebrews discussion talks about how *Joshua* wasn't able to offer the Israelites true rest. If the fourth commandment had been the end-all, it seems like we'd be reading about that here in Hebrews. But that's not where the argument takes us.

Hebrews 4:9 says, “So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.” It’s important for modern readers to understand that we’re not done with this topic yet. Or maybe better to say: God’s not done with this topic.

Because of our sabbath confusion in the church, many people, including many in the next generation of church leaders, have completely abandoned the idea of sabbath. But God’s not done with it. There is something about sabbath rest with which God expects believers to stay engaged. And maybe, sabbath doesn’t mean what we think it means.

The next verse we need to look at is Hebrews 4:10: “For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.” It’s important to pay attention to the capital letters in this verse; they refer to God.

Here’s my own explanatory translation of what’s going on. This passage is saying, “For the one [the believer in Christ] who has entered His rest [God’s rest] has himself [the believer has] also rested from his works [the believer’s own works], as God did from His [from God’s work].”

It’s a bit of a confusing statement, to be sure. To what is this even referring? When was it that God was working and then rested from His work?

Well, that’s talking about the creation account in Genesis 1:1–2:3. This Hebrews passage is linking us back to Genesis. But notice where it’s *not* sending us. It’s not sending us back to the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5. The answer isn’t found there. The definition of rest existed well before the exodus from Egypt and before the Mosaic Law was ever written down. The author of Hebrews is suggesting that there’s something unique about the Genesis creation account that holds the key to our understanding of rest.

Then in Hebrews 4:11, the author encourages us to “be diligent to enter that rest.” Hebrews was written to believers—after the earthly ministry of Jesus. And it encourages them to “be diligent” to experience the rest that God has to offer. It’s a warning to New Testament folks, saying, “Don’t jump ship on sabbath rest!”

To borrow modern language, it's time to "lean in" on rest and examine it more fully.

For now, we are going to let this passage lead us back to the beginning of the biblical story to ask some important questions about rest:

- What is it about God's rest that sends us back to the beginning?
- What does it even mean when it says that God rested?
- How is God's rest defined?

As we've seen, Hebrews 4:8–11 links the two types of rest (God's rest and a believer's rest) together and suggests they are similar. If we can figure out how God rested, then we will be one step closer to finding out what kind of rest believers are called to today.

God Rested on the Seventh Day

By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made. (Genesis 2:2–3)

Our brief look at Hebrews 4 has brought us back to the beginning of the biblical story, the account of creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3. Specifically, what does it mean in Genesis 2:2–3 when it states that God rested on the seventh day? If we can determine what that means, we will be on our way to figuring out the nature of the rest that's available to believers.¹¹ Remember that Hebrews 4:10 tells us that these concepts (God's rest and a believer's rest) are similar in nature.

Let's look at what happened in the first chapter of Genesis, which will help us determine what it was that God stopped doing when He rested.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. (Genesis 1:1–2)

As we approach the story of creation, we know there are a number of ways it has been interpreted. But no matter what understanding one has of these events, I'm going to propose it can be generally understood as taking something from a chaotic and disordered state and getting it to a place where everything works. No matter what view one holds about its interpretation, the process of bringing order to the universe can be clearly seen in this creation account. Just look at how Genesis 1:2 describes the earth in the beginning. It's described as being "formless and void."

What does that even mean?

It almost seems like there was nothing there, but we know that wasn't the case because there was earth, and water seemed to be covering everything. Later in the story the waters will be separated and dry land will appear. So, the earth is there but it is described in the language of non-order and non-function. No plants growing, no animals, no people, no way to tell time, no mechanisms in place to regulate the seasons of life. Ultimately, this earth will house humanity, but it's nowhere close to ready in this beginning state.

A Place to Be . . .

The remainder of the chapter (Genesis 1:3–31) describes the process of how God gave order to the world. What does this order look like? Let's start by defining order as "giving everything a place to be" and see what this looks like in the opening chapter of the Bible.

God says, "Light . . . you go over there."

"Darkness . . . there."

"Water . . . here, land there."

"Sky . . . up there."

"Luminaries . . . you go up there in the sky."

I realize this is rather simplistic, but when God gave everything a place to be, He took control of the chaos and He brought order to it. This action says something about the very nature of God. He wants to fix the chaos in the world.

About every six months, I do this same thing to my garage. There's lots of stuff in my garage, and it's usually in some form of disordered chaos. When it gets really bad, I spend a day (or six) giving everything a place to be.

"Sharp tools with handles . . . you go over there."

"Old grubby shoes caked with mud . . . there."

"Fishing gear (that I haven't used in years) . . . here."

"Folding chairs . . . there."

"Hot-tub chemicals . . . way up there."

When I'm done with this process of ordering my garage, it usually looks pretty good. I'll grab my wife to show her how clean it is, but that's usually not enough. I'll post "before and after" pictures on social media and invite people over to see my work. I'm weird that way.

. . . and Something to Do

In God's story of creation, God gave everything a place to be (ordering the chaos), but He also gave everything a thing to do (a function).

"Land . . . you know where you are supposed to be, now I'm going to give you something to do. You grow stuff, and let animals walk around on you. That's your job."

"Waters . . . you are going to hold swarms of living creatures, and you'll be used to water the stuff growing on the land. That's your thing to do."

"Luminaries . . . you are going to rotate so that there are days, seasons, and years. Things will grow and life will flourish."

God is giving things a place to be and something to do. Then on day six, humans are created and they are given the same. What is it that

humans are given to do? In Genesis 1:28, God says, “Be fruitful and multiply.”

That is certainly something to do!¹²

He also instructs humanity to “subdue” the earth and “rule” over the other living creatures. This is an important distinction given to humans in the creation account. God invites humanity to join Him as delegates in the process of ruling.

He invites humans to be on the earth ruling as His vicegerents.¹³ These are humanity’s place to be and thing to do!

Then on the seventh day (Genesis 2:1–3), God is done with His creative work, and He rests. Oftentimes this rest is portrayed as ceasing work and not doing anything for the purpose of recuperation. That’s what many people think is going on here. But there is something perplexing about that premise. Let’s ask the honest questions everyone is thinking:

What’s God doing resting and recuperating?

Is God not all-powerful?

Is He really tired?

Does He really need a break?

I don’t think there is much theological wiggle room to answer those last three questions with anything but “no, no, and no.” An all-powerful God doesn’t require rest to recuperate, so there must be something else happening in this passage. What are we missing? Why is it stated this way?

Extrabiblical Help

This is where we get some help from extrabiblical sources. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, archaeologists have unearthed thousands of tablets of ancient Near Eastern literature from Egyptian, Hittite, Mesopotamian, Babylonian, and other ancient cultures.¹⁴ Stories found on some of these tablets explain the creation of the cosmos at the hands

of pagan gods. In these stories the pagan gods often compete with each other for the right to set up and rule the cosmos.¹⁵

Interestingly, some of these pagan stories have similarities with the biblical creation story. This shouldn't be too surprising, since many of them were written in a similar time and ancient Near Eastern cultural tradition. Such stories were told in a format that the people of their context would understand. Some of these secular stories also include an element where the pagan deity rests at the end of the creation process.¹⁶

This is a similarity that suggests to us that we can possibly go to those stories to find a definition or an idea of how rest was viewed in that culture and in that time. If we can determine what rest means in those contexts, we may have some help in understanding what's going on in the biblical account.

In the extrabiblical accounts, the victorious pagan god usually builds a temple, moves into that temple, and takes command of the cosmos. In those accounts, this process of ruling the earth is described as "resting." This is the ancient idea of rest and several modern scholars have noticed this secular connection to the concept of biblical rest. One author in particular, Dr. John H. Walton, has written extensively on the topic. He has concluded that in the ancient Near Eastern world, rest was understood as what results when a crisis has been resolved or when stability has been achieved.

In those cultures, rest wasn't disengagement from the cares, worries, and tasks of life (on a beach vacation, lying in a hammock). Rather, rest is where the day-to-day routines are established. For ancient pagan gods, this meant they could oversee the day-to-day operations of the cosmos.

To bring this into more of a modern setting, Americans could use similar language for the person who rules from the White House. The president is elected and fills all the cabinet positions with the right people, and then moves into the White House and rules from the Oval Office.

Or consider the process that a new football coach goes through when hired by a university. The coach locates assistants to help organize and coordinate the team's defense, offense, and special teams. He recruits

players to come to the school. He orders equipment and uniforms. Once all the pieces are in place and the season arrives, the coach can begin practices and prepare for the first game. In an ancient context, the end result in these two examples could be referred to as “resting.”

Walton has said we should think of this idea of rest as “more a matter of engagement without obstacles . . . rather than disengagement without responsibilities.”¹⁷

This is a key point for our entire study. The way we should understand rest at the end of the creation account in Genesis is more a matter of God’s engagement without obstacles than His disengagement without responsibilities. When it says that God rested on day seven, He’s not taking a day off. He’s actually beginning His full engagement as ruler of the cosmos, now that His order has been established.

Adam and Eve at Rest with God

Why is all this important? Because Adam and Eve were originally at rest with God in the garden of Eden. Eden was the special place of God’s presence, and like most temples in the ancient Near East it too was located on a mountain, with rivers of life flowing from it.¹⁸ How do we know Adam and Eve were at rest? The text tells us this way:

Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. (Genesis 2:15)

God gave them a place to be and a thing to do! But several English translations veil the most important aspect of this verse. The word describing how God “placed” humanity in the garden is a Hebrew word for “rest.”¹⁹ It could be understood that God took the human and “rested him” in the garden to do his work. He was there to abide, rest, and take up residence.²⁰ The garden had been ordered and structured and humanity was at rest with God in that sacred space.²¹ They were in their place, fulfilling their God-given role, and functioning the way they were intended to function.

Some like to think of Eden as the perfect world, but it wasn't. God created the function and order needed to assemble His entire kingdom, but He didn't originally create the completed product. Eden was really only the beginning of that process. God created all the parts and invited humanity to help Him with the assembly.

Lisa and I sometimes purchase furniture at IKEA. For those who don't know, IKEA is a company known for their wide variety of household furniture and goods. Their massive stores are organized as one never-ending maze of displays. They provide one section after another where they've staged their furniture to look like it can never look in *your* house. When we wander through their labyrinth, Lisa usually falls in love with something they've set out. She'll say something like, "Oh, wouldn't that look good in our bedroom?" And before I have time to respond, she's written down the number associated with the piece of furniture, and has already started skipping her way to the next adventure along their yellow-brick road.

That's usually when I start noticing a familiar pain on the top of my head. No, I haven't hit it on anything; I've just shopped here before. And I know the piece of furniture with which she fell in love is not the one they end up selling us. Their maze eventually leads to a gigantic warehouse where we find the number she wrote down and load a rectangular box into our cart.²² The box contains all the pieces, but the furniture is not assembled. But not to worry—they provide a thirty-seven-page instruction manual which portrays a stick-figure person easily assembling the furniture. Even though I usually like the finished product, during the assembly process I've directed some very unholy comments toward that stick-figure character. I'm rarely able to fill his shoes!

In a similar way, God originally created a place for humanity, and provided all the pieces needed to assemble the finished product. But except for Eden, assembly wasn't included. And instead of providing a stick-figure instruction manual, the manufacturer followed humanity home to assemble the remaining creation as a joint venture. God knew if Adam and Eve fulfilled their fruitful mandate under His rule, Eden

would need to expand into the unassembled parts of the world. In this way, His rule and order would spread to the entire creation.

The end of the biblical story describes a preview of this fully assembled kingdom. In Revelation 21–22, this new creation is described with several interesting features. We read about one of those features right away. The new creation doesn't have any sea (Revelation 21:1). This is sometimes understood as the lack of any large bodies of water, but, in the ancient Near Eastern culture, wild areas of the world were understood as *liminal space*.

“Liminal” is a term that describes an in-between state or transitional boundary between two places. I often think of the threshold of my front door as liminal space. When I'm in that place, I'm neither fully in my house, nor have I yet arrived outside. I'm in “liminal land.”²³

The ancient Near Eastern understanding of the world outside Eden would have included a liminal realm where God's rule was yet to be established or maintained. According to Walton, “The liminal realm existed on the periphery of creation and was home to dangerous animals; harsh and inedible plants; hostile terrain such as deserts, mountains, or the sea.”²⁴

So, in the biblical world of Genesis 2, the space outside the garden would have still included liminal land that would need to be subdued and brought under God's rule. But in Revelation 21, the absence of a sea is likely describing a world where all the liminal space within the creation has been brought under His authority. The end state describes a world where the rule of Eden has spread and consumed the entire creation. In the end, the assembly of the kingdom is complete. But that's at the end of the process.

According to Dr. Gregory Beale, “Because Adam and Eve were to subdue and rule ‘over all the earth,’ it is plausible to suggest that they were to extend the geographical boundaries of the garden until Eden covered the whole earth. They were on the primeval hillock of hospitable Eden, outside of which lay the inhospitable land. They were to extend the smaller liveable area of the garden by transforming the outer chaotic region into a habitable territory.”²⁵

When Adam and Eve are in the garden, we understand the world outside Eden as categorically different space. From their place in the garden, Adam and Eve began cultivating, keeping, subduing, and ruling within God's wisdom. They were operating in the seventh-day work of His rule. This is important because Adam and Eve's restful residence in Eden was conditional.

Do you know what happened next? Adam and Eve started working outside their God-given role. When they learned that the tree in the middle of the garden offered an opportunity to acquire "ordering wisdom," it sounded enticing. It was their chance to challenge the order that God had created and, like God, attempt to establish their own.

Their choice to eat from the tree was an effort to subvert His rule and gain the wisdom necessary to create their own system . . . to their own glory. It's first called the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:17), but we later find out they understood it to be a source of ordering "wisdom" (Genesis 3:6). With that type of wisdom, they could create their own order and bring glory to themselves instead of God.

Their motives were symbolized by the shame of their nakedness. That's what they tried to cover, and that's why they hid from God. And since they thought they had a better plan, it's also the reason they were exiled. They stepped outside their "place" and "thing," and biblically speaking they were exiled from their rest and entered a place of unrest. Adam and Eve's rest was directly connected to the garden and submitting to God's rule. When they stopped observing God's rule, they stopped sharing in the rest that He offered.

In those early chapters of Genesis, Adam and Eve are presented as representatives for all of humanity. So, when they chose to leave *their* rest it also disrupted *humanity's* opportunity to live at rest. Do you remember the penalties Adam and Eve experienced? As a result of their choices, the land of their exile was cursed by God (Genesis 3:17). The land was removed from God's blessing, and any yield would now require painful labor.²⁶ Humanity's work in this curse-a-day land would be substantially different than the work they had experienced in the garden. Their things

to do (be fruitful and multiply, subdue and rule) would now be done in a cursed land full of pain, toil, nuisance, and anxiety (Genesis 3:16–19).²⁷

Eve would continue to follow God's mandate of fruitfulness, but now that process would be wrought with anxiety and trauma. Her trouble was not so much a description of the labor of giving birth, but the hardship of knowing the world into which her offspring would be born. Her anxious toil began with the news she had conceived. That's when she recognized her seed would come forth, grow, and someday face his own death. But she didn't yet understand the pain of also giving birth to the hand that would kill him.

Adam would follow God's mandate to cultivate and keep a garden, but now it would be outside Eden's rest. And like Eve, his work in a cursed land would also be filled with trauma. He would soon realize the struggle of creating order in his new existence. And he would now need to protect himself from others who would seek to establish their own. He would become weary from his lack of rest and recognize this as wages paid.

The exile of those representatives suggests that all of humanity will no longer instinctually desire to be where they were meant to be or do what they were meant to do in the way they were supposed to do it. Our whole existence will be restless.

If this is how we are to understand this idea of biblical rest, it is the same place humanity finds itself today. We are outside of Eden's rule. We try to do what we were made to do, but we are operating outside the function and order within which God created us to work. When this is how we function, we are in a state of unrest.

We are restless.

That's where the creation account leaves humanity. Then the biblical story continues with the descendants of Adam and Eve and the problems that ensued because of humanity's exile from rest.

But what would it mean for God to invite humanity back to a place of rest? It would be an invitation back to the function and order that God had originally planned. It would be an invitation to return to God's direction for us to use our talents to rule and subdue the earth.

Understanding humanity's unrest is just the first step in an IKEA-like labyrinth of interconnected ideas presented in the Bible. We're making good progress, but we've only just begun.

What Did God Do on the Eighth Day?

There's one additional aspect of the Genesis account of creation that further develops this understanding of God's seventh-day rest. In that first chapter of the Bible, the author uses a repetitive literary device to signify the end of each of the days of creation. It goes something like this: "There was evening and there was morning . . . an 'X' day." The author uses this phrase for each of the first six days of creation (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31).

Authors generally use repetition like this for a reason. Repetition suggests congruity, builds familiarity, and establishes expectations for their readers. Repetition also develops a platform from which to jump when the author decides to break from its use.

In my early twenties, I taught junior high English and Language Arts in Puyallup, Washington. Those days were exhausting, but they were also some of the most fun I've had in my whole life. I used repetitive patterns each year to keep my students off-balance. One example of this happened as school began each fall. I would come the first day of school wearing a dress shirt and tie, giving homework to each class. They would receive the "shirt and tie/homework every night" routine for the first two weeks.

Then came Parent Night. It was an evening where the students stayed home and their parents came to campus and spent ten minutes in each of their children's classes with a five-minute passing time between presentations. It was a fast-paced schedule and many parents got lost wandering around the campus.

It was on Parent Night that I chose to break my repetitive pattern. On that night I wore a bathrobe (over my clothes) and slippers. Parents would come in, laugh a little at my costume, and listen to my description of their child's class. I would then dismiss them without much explanation of my attire.

The next day the students, having heard from their parents the night before, would come into class with questions about why I wore a bathrobe and slippers on Parent Night. But that next day I greeted the students in my regular shirt and tie, gave homework as usual, and suggested their parents might be a bit confused. I said it must have been one of their other teachers that did such an outlandish thing.

I played with them in this way for another week or so until I eventually wore the bathrobe and slippers during school. I established and broke from repetitive patterns like this the whole year. It kept my students off-balance and supplied me with the energy I needed to teach junior high!²⁸

Repetition can be used to establish a pattern, and also gather attention to highlight a change when that established pattern is abandoned.

Each of the first six days of creation end with the same repetitive phrase. “And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day” (Genesis 1:31b). But on the seventh day of creation, the author abandons this literary device. After each of the first six days, the author has lulled us to sleep each day with his “evening and morning” formula. It’s a pattern that signifies to readers the end of one particular activity and the beginning of another.

But this isn’t the only example of literary repetition the author uses. At several points throughout the creation process God describes the different aspects of His creation as “good.” In Genesis 1:4, God saw that the light was good. In Genesis 1:10, the separation of the dry land from the waters is also described as good. And so it is with each step of the creative process; with vegetation-bearing fruit and seeds (1:12), the lights governing the day and night (1:18), living creatures in the sea and in the air (1:21), and the beasts of the ground (1:25). In this context, “good” simply means that these items are in their “place to be” and are functioning properly.

But then on the sixth day that literary repetition is abandoned when the creation process is completed. “God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31a). This change, from “good” to “very good,” signifies the end of something. For God, this is the end of His

creative process. There will be no more giving function and order to the cosmos; that ordering work is complete. It is very good.

With the completion of that process the reader is poised to consider what's next. The seventh day and God's restful rule is what follows (Genesis 2:1–3). It is this seventh day that also lacks a mention of the evening/morning motif. The rapid changes from "good" to "very good" and the dropping of the evening/morning pattern signify a dramatic change in the story.

I often say that the seventh day of creation had no evening or morning. Of course, I mean this not literally, but literarily. What's the difference?

We know that the seventh day literally came to an end. How do we know this? Because we all went to bed last night and got up this morning. Today is a new day, and it's not the seventh day. But asking that same question from a literary perspective produces a dramatically different answer. Literarily speaking, the abandonment of the evening/morning repetition on the seventh day suggests that this day—or more accurately, the theological events of the day—never ended. This is a significant point in the narrative.

I usually highlight this by asking, "What did God do on the eighth day?" You may want to say that God returned to work on the eighth day. That would certainly line up with the example of the fourth commandment (six days on, one day off, then back to work again). Maybe you've always thought of God's rest, on the seventh day, as a one-day event in which God, even though He didn't need physical rest, modeled for humanity a physical day of rest which we are to imitate.

But surprisingly, the way the creation account is written suggests that the rest God entered into on the seventh day never ended. His rest continued on into the eighth day, the ninth, the tenth, and so on. This makes sense with the definition of rest we have identified thus far. On the sixth day God concluded His creative acts; everything had its place to be and thing to do. Then, on the seventh day, God began his rule over the cosmos, and that rule has never ended. It continues today. God continues to be fully engaged in the cosmos as its ruler. He is still "at rest."²⁹

As Walton suggests, “God’s rest did not involve relaxation but rule. Obviously we are not called to imitate his rule; we are called to acknowledge it and participate in it. On the sabbath we are to set aside our own attempts to bring order to our world by our own efforts.”³⁰

For a time, Adam and Eve did just that. They set aside any attempts to reorder the world and lived in relationship with God under his restful authority and reign. But when they stepped outside God’s rule, and began to govern their own way of life, they were removed from the place of rest.

This situation created an important dilemma. God knows that, outside the garden, humans have poor memory. He knows that the further we get from Adam and Eve’s experience of rest, the more humanity will forget that restful relationship ever existed. He knows we will begin to assume that what we are experiencing now, life outside the garden, is what God originally intended.

And He’s right. Many have misunderstood the nature of the Eden experience and concluded that the way in which the world is functioning is just the way it is. One of my favorite sayings is, “It is what it is.” But God is saying something different. He wants everyone to know, “This isn’t what it was”—and maybe more importantly, “This isn’t what it will be.” God doesn’t want His creation to forget this ancient truth.

So, God devised a plan to remind humanity that the world was once at rest, that rest is still available, and that it will one day be completely fulfilled.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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, Dr. 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, Dr. Chip Bennett, was the first to suggest I look into Dr. 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, Dr. Karen Jobes, Dr. Warren Gage, Dr. Scott Manor, and Dr. 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 Fleming, 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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has been a huge influence in the development of my thinking. He was willing to read my manuscript, then offered to work with me on several rounds of edits, encouraged me through the publishing process, and wrote the foreword to this book.

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Finally, there are two people who I wish were still around to read this. My dad, Larry, passed away from cancer shortly before my doctoral graduation in 2017. I still resemble him in many ways, and I'm proud to keep his memory alive every time I burp. My big sister and only sibling, Jodi, passed away unexpectedly in her sleep in September of 2020. She and I got our picture taken with Santa for fifty-one straight years and she was my biggest fan. At times she was more excited about this book than I was! I grieve the fact that I can't personally hand these two family members a copy of the finished product.

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 D. 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.

ENDNOTES

Introduction

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

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

³ Grant, *Think Again*, 4.

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

Chapter 1

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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!

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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).

⁹ This saying has a completely different meaning after the recent pandemic!

¹⁰ It's important 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.

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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.

¹³ I like the term vicegerent (vice-jir-ent) over "vice-regent" or even "coregent." I believe it to be a more accurate descriptor of 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.

¹⁴ 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 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).

¹⁵ 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. The biblical author uses this contrast to discount the pagan, polytheistic versions of creation.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ As Dr. 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.

¹⁹ 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’ (*sûm*) 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.

²⁰ Jon Collins and Dr. 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 – 7th Day Rest E3,” BibleProject Podcast, October 28, 2019, 61:00, <https://bibleproject.com/podcast/two-kinds-work>.

²¹ 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.

²² 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.

²³ Dr. Carmen 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.” Carmen J. Imes, *Bearing God’s Name: Why Sinai Still Matters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 17.

²⁴ 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.

²⁵ Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, vol. 17, 81–82.

²⁶ 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 (ʿrr) 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.

²⁷ 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.

²⁸ I give credit for this perspective to Dr. Gib Binnington, who taught a class for teachers called “Disrupting the Disruptor.”

²⁹ 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.

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

Chapter 2

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

³² I’m borrowing the use of “hyperlink” not only from the internet, but also from Jon Collins and Dr. Tim Mackie of BibleProject. They often use this term to suggest an intended connection between otherwise seemingly unrelated biblical texts and ideas.

³³ 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.