

All of us have a fairly solidified idea about how the world works- an **understanding of how life “works.”** Hardship, disaster, trial, illness or even just the potential of those sorts of things TEST OUR RESOLVE on our theory of life, *our paradigm of existence*.

Like if you go down to **Elevated Ice Cream** and you get a waffle cone of oreo cookie and mocha-chip and you’re standing there on the dock eating it on a beautiful day and thinking: **Wow! Life is so good. What a wonderful world. God sure loves me!** And then a kid runs by, bumps you and you drop your cone into the bay—and your whole world view gets revised: **Boy, Thanks a lot God, what a crummy world. Life is such a pain!!**

**Remember our talking about “pivotal circumstances”** painful, frightening, debilitating life events –much worse than dropping your ice cream in the drink- that can make people question God’s love or even existence. [a child born with a debilitating disease, earthquake, Tsunami, hurricane, the suicide of a friend,] And we talked about the importance of **“providential relationships”** to “encourage one another daily”.

We need that assist because difficult, painful or just inconvenient **circumstances** are pretty effective at spooking us into re-thinking our worldview- especially shifting it from positive to negative.

Our Hebrews haven’t been killed for their faith [12:4] but they’ve faced conflict and reproach, and had property taken from them [10:32ff]. Despite embracing Jesus as Lord and the Good News of the Kingdom as true, their resolve is being tested- like a seed in rocky soil. And our author is using every possible argument to keep them from abandoning the Rest of God that Jesus offers.

In appealing to these Jewish Christians our author reminds them of their family history. After all the incredible ways God acted on the **Exodus Generation’s** behalf in love and power, at the edge of the promised land- at the gateway to God’s Rest they sacrifice their Faith to their Fear.

Ten men of the GenEx who’d explored the PL said: the people living there are big and strong and dangerous- we felt like grasshoppers next to them. We’re dead if we cross into that land. **Thanks a lot God, what a crummy world. Life is such a pain!!**

Joshua and Caleb say **[SLIDE]:** Num 14: 8 [NIV] If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. 9 Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them.”

But the people believe the ten and consider the idea of stoning Joshua and Caleb grumbling: “ Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! And God says: “Alrightythen... **[SLIDE]**

28 ...As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say: **29 In this desert your bodies will fall**—every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. **30** Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.

The result: **GenEx lived out the remainder of their lives outside of the Rest** God intended to give them. As Hebrews author quotes: I declared, on oath, in my anger they shall never enter my rest.

*What shut them out of God's Rest? And what threatens to shut our Hebrews out of God's rest?* Our text could not be more clear that **unbelief and disobedience shut us off from God's Rest**. And it's fairly easy to see it. I'll show you...

Heb 3 ends rehashing the results of the Israelites rebellion with a crystal clear statement: **[SLIDE]** <sup>16</sup> Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? <sup>17</sup> And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? <sup>18</sup> And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? <sup>19</sup> **So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.** Again and again God is quoted: "They shall never enter my Rest." And Unbelief was the reason.

**Lack of faith** means the same as "**unbelief**" and they both lead to **disobedience**.

**[SLIDE]** 4:2 ...the message they heard was of no value to them, **because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed**. There are some MSS variations in this verse. Some MSS of Hebrews read like above. Others like this: **[SLIDE]** [NLT]... But it did them no good because *they didn't share the faith of those who listened to God.* **[SLIDE]** [NIV] ...but the message they heard was of no value to them, because *those who heard did not combine it with faith.*

In both readings, "hearing" isn't enough *there must be faith that prompts action in line with God's will. For instance: having faith and trust to follow God into the Promised land of Rest.*

On the positive side we see authentic belief results in REST. **[SLIDE]** 4:3 ... we who have **believed** enter that rest, ...

Active belief produces obedience to God. Unbelief produces disobedience and disobedience shuts out Rest. **[SLIDE]** 4:6 ...those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their **disobedience**

The Israelite's disobedience [refusing to enter God's rest] resulted in their perishing in the wilderness [3:17]. So the author tells our Hebrews to make every effort to enter God's Rest **[SLIDE]** 4:11 ...so that no one will perish by following their example of **disobedience**.

And, of course ch3 already strictly warned us against being . **3:13** ...hardened by sin's deceitfulness. And having **3:12** ... a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God

So our text says **unbelief and disobedience shut us out of God's rest.**

In Unbelief AND disobedience the Israelites said: **[SLIDE]**

Num 13:31..“We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” And 14:3 Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” 4 And they said to each other, “We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”

Please notice that the first comment is all about their own military strength, with no faith in God’s presence or protection. And in the second **Unbelief** in God’s ability to take them forward results in the **disobedience** of refusing the promised Rest God wants to give them AND actively planning to return to Egypt and to slavery [reversing God’s efforts].

What shuts us off from God’s Rest is **unbelief and disobedience**.  
**And this is because of the actual nature of God’s Rest.**

Last week as I was showing you the 5 meanings of rest in this passage [God’s Rest, Sabbath Rest, Place of Rest, Spiritual Rest and, Future Rest] I was thinking: there has to be some sort of broad, general way to define God’s Rest- especially in the foundation passage about God’s rest [Gen 2:1-2].

But it’s baffling because it can’t possibly be rest the way we think of it.

We know **God isn’t pooped** and needing a sit-down on day7: **Is 40:28** ...The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. And though the Hebrew word for “rest” in Gen 2 means “**to cease**” we know God is unceasingly engaged in maintaining the Kosmos [read PS 104 later]. **So how do we decipher God’s rest?** Let alone, how unbelief and disobedience shut us out of it.

Well I think an answer comes from a professor of OT at Wheaton College -**John H. Walton**- an expert on the OT and it’s ancient near eastern background. In his book: **The Lost World of Genesis One** he explores other ancient creation stories and cosmologies because **[SLIDE]** “...despite all the distinctions that existed across the ancient world, any given ancient culture was more similar to other ancient cultures than any of them are to Western American or European culture.”  
He’s not talking about borrowing stories or ideas culture to culture. He’s saying different cultures in any time period- for all their differences- share a lot of common threads. And this is so for cultures as diverse as Mesopotamia, Assyria, Egypt & Israel.

Without going into literary details, **ancient near east cultures often connected their creation stories to the building of a temple.** I mean: within their stories of creation the gods are also building a temple for themselves. [There’s also a reflection of this in that ancient temple structure and equipment often reflect a “mini-Kosmos” – which both the tabernacle and Solomon’s temple do.]

What’s different in Genesis 1 is that the Kosmos IS the temple because, as Walton puts it: **[SLIDE]**

*“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.”*

**Modern churches** are made for people to gather for worship. Ancient Near Eastern temples were built as a place of rest- home and headquarters for the gods.

**And this was also true for Israel.** Ps 132 shows the temple as God’s resting place:

**[SLIDE]** Psa. 132:7 “Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool—  
8 arise, O LORD, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.

**Psa. 132:13** For the LORD has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling:

**14** “This is my resting place for ever and ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it—

Consider... **[SLIDE]** Is. 66:1 This is what the LORD says: “**Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.** Where is the house you will build for me? **Where will my resting place be?** 2 Has not **my hand made all these things**, and so they came into being?” ... These verses connect the **Kosmos** with the idea of **temple** and both of those with a place of **rest!** And the Throne and footstool point to **God’s rule and reign**

**We think of REST as disengagement:** a nap, a vacation. Ancient Near East cultures did not see it this way. In the ancient near east, **rest was that state after a crisis when things settled down and resumed normal routines.** Walton again: **[SLIDE]** “This is more a matter of engagement without obstacles rather than disengagement without responsibilities.”

We can find “rest” meaning engaging in normal activities in our own OT **[SLIDE]:**

**Deut. 12:10** But you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety.

The people are “at rest,” their enemies subdued, the crisis over and now they’re going on about the normal business of their lives: work, family, worship, etc.

So let’s apply this to God’s Rest on day 7 of creation. God has built himself a temple in days 1-6. In ancient cultures temples were understood to be the center of the deity’s rule, God’s headquarters, His control room. **And so the original creation work done God enters his temple and “takes up His REST.**

That is, for God to be “at REST” in His temple means God is taking command.

In the Ancient Near Eastern view God at rest in his temple is God on His throne engaging in the regular operations of running the universe.

Walton finishes with this thought **[SLIDE]:** “Sometimes people have raised the question, What did God do on the eighth day? ...on the eighth day, and on every day since then, he is in the control room from where He runs the cosmos that He set up. This is the ongoing work of creation.”

So God’s Rest in Genesis 1 is God settling in to the ongoing work of Kosmic operations, bringing about his will in the world, sending rain on the just and unjust.

Giving his only Son. Tracking the fall of even the smallest sparrow. And, as Jesus said: *You are worth more [to God] than many sparrows.*

**So what does this have to do with UNBELIEF and DISOBEDIENCE shutting us out of God's rest?**

*We've said for God to be "at REST" in His temple means God is taking command.*

Well, if God's Rest is God's active rule over all creation- including us and our lives then when we **believe** that's so and **obey Him** accordingly we are entering his Rest.

**Unbelief and disobedience** are, in essence, the refusal of God's rule. **[SLIDE]:**

**The refusal to trust that God is in control is the refusal of God's REST.**

And that refusal is marked by unbelief and disobedience.

**Generation Exodus** on the outskirts of the Promised Land- in which they would find God's Rest- are shut out because of their unbelief and disobedience. They refuse to trust that God is actively engaged in overseeing the Kosmos- and in particular their part of it. They don't even include God in the equation. They just say: if we go in there we'll die. And if their grumbling isn't enough **disobedience** they start making a plan to go back to Egypt...and slavery –which would be to reverse everything God's done for them.

**Because of unbelief and disobedience GenEx lived out the remainder of their lives outside of the Rest** God had wanted to give them. This was so because they refused to trust that God was in control of their situation. And so their unbelief and their disobedience shut them out from God's Rest.

**Their refusal to trust that God was in control was their refusal of God's REST.**

**Wednesday night Priscilla asked an astute question:** If God's Rest is God engaged in the work of ruling the world, why then does God command his people **Ex. 20:9** Six days you shall labor and do all your work, **10** but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.

Because the point of God's people not working on the Sabbath, -even during the height of the harvest- was to emphasize the very reality of God's Rest. God is in His temple, on the throne ruling and reigning over this world, which includes caring for you. The command for God's people to do no work on the Sabbath was intended to encourage TRUST and FAITH and OBEDIENCE in the people.

To be worried about your well-being on the Sabbath was UNBELIEF. And to work on the Sabbath was disobedience. And that shut them off from the Rest of God.

**Jesus says: Matt. 11:28** "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. **29** 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. It's the same. God's rest [the knowledge that God is in control] is found through belief in Jesus. **As it says: Heb 4:3** Now we who have believed enter that rest,

The means to entering God's rest is to trust God –to believe and obey- even when it's really hard.

A wise old Olympic Mountains Guide promised me that **Lost Pass** was an unbelievably glorious place. A plateau so packed with glacier and avalanche lilies you couldn't walk without crushing them. And where there weren't lilies there were purple lupines backing all the way up to silver gray bones of long-dead firs blending with the cool green of subalpine firs, stunted and twisted by wind and snow.

**It was a glorious place of rest that was promised by the intrepid, mountain guide.**

Having never seen it. I didn't know. The guide said it would be worth it. We'd been on the trail half a day when it was time for the ascent to Lost Pass- the trail to the promised land of rest- the place we would drop our burdens and pitch our tents- was only nine tenths of a mile long. But in that short distance it gained 1100 feet.

Hiking books describe the trail as "primitive," "steep," and "difficult." The ascent is often nearly vertical, so much so that an occasional series of switchbacks is a relief.

**Our Guide promised a glorious resting place at the top- would we believe him through the switchbacks?**

Besides the constant "up" a lot of trees had been dropped over the trail by last winter's snows demanding we remove our packs just to get through. It was very frustrating.

**But our Guide promised a glorious resting place at the top- would we believe or would we say: forget this, I'm going back down and descend in disobedience.**

Besides the steepness and the fallen trees. It was clear and HOT. We were thirsty, tired and **our knees were full of "unbelief and a taste for disobedience- calling us to question trusting our guide about the glorious rest at the top.**

It was a long, hard, slow step all the way.

It took some of us over two hours to hike that 9/10s of a mile.

But when we reached the top a delicious breeze cooled us down as we sat in the bug-free shade of jade-green subalpine firs and lounged among the lupines and lillies. A cold little creek quenched our thirst. We dropped our burdens and rejoiced in the rest our guide had promised. **And we were thankful that unbelief and disobedience had not kept us from our guides "glorious rest.**