

# CHRIST: SUPERIOR TO JOSHUA

## Hebrews 3:7-19 and 4:1-11

Compiled By Dr. Gary M. Gulan, ©1983 (Rev. 92,01,09)

We are covering the theme “superior” or “better” in the book of Hebrews. So far in our outline, we have examined: (1.) “Christ is Superior to the Prophets: Being a Better Revelator, (Heb. 1:1-3); (2.) “Christ is Superior to the Angels: Having a Better Name, (Heb. 1:4-2:18); (3.) “Christ is Superior to Moses: Having a Better House,” (Heb. 3:1-19); and now (4.) Christ is Superior to Joshua: Having a Better Rest.”

There are several words for “rest” in the Bible. The word “rest” means “cease from work” it does not mean “worship” or “Saturday.” The context defines what the word “rest” means. (MacArthur, MNTC, p. 96)

### The words “therefore and “for” (4:1-2)

The subject of “rest” is introduced in the “hinged section” (3:7-19). The words “therefore” (Heb. 4:1) and “for” (4:1) reveal this is a hinge section. I call it a hinge section because it addresses these saved Jews who were wanting to go back to Judaism from Christianity (1.) by implying they are acting like the Israelites of Moses’ day by not entering into Christ’s “rest” (2.) while at the same time, laying the ground work to address these saved Jews with the “rest” associated with Joshua. (Wuest, p. 83; MacArthur, MNTC, p. 97; Guthrie, p. 149; Kistemaker, p. 104)

The warning of this section of Hebrews is that these individuals would not be entering into Christ’s “rest” just like their founding fathers didn’t enter Joshua’s rest. There was a real danger, not of losing one’s salvation, but of ceasing to have communion with the Lord or not having a full spiritual relationship with the Lord. (Pink, p. 202) This lesson is so important to the individual Christian life and the life of the church.

What is the writer talking about when he uses the word “rest?” Are we to follow a “seventh-day” worship service? Are we to “rest” meaning cease from all work on the “seventh-day?” Should we be a part of the Seventh-Day Adventists? There are five specific theological or technical “rests” stated in Scripture.

#### 1. Creative “rest” (Hb. “shabat” Gr. “katepausen”)(Gen. 2:2-3; Heb. 4:4)

This rest occurred at “creation” on the seventh day by God. God ceased “creating” something from nothing. He rested from His creative work. It refers to God’s action of ceasing from His creation activity. This “rest” is referenced in the book of Hebrews, (Heb. 4:4).

#### 2. Sabbath “rest” (Hb. “sabbath” Gr. “sabbaton”)(Ex. 16:23-26; 20:8-11; Lev. 23:3; Deut. 5:12-15).

This rest was given to Israel at Mt. Sinai in the giving of the Mosaic. Israel was to cease from all work on the seventh day as a sign of the covenant with God. It is not worship, however, it is a special holy day for Israel as a part of the Mosaic Law and covenant with God. This “rest” is not mentioned in our section of study in the book of Hebrews. The Seventh-Day Adventists are wrong on imposing Sabbath keeping upon the church, (Rom. 4:15; Gal. 4:10; Col. 2:16). “No one should be misled into thinking [Gr. ‘dokeo’ 4:1] that he has come short of God’s rest by following Christ alone apart from the Old Testament ritual.” (Kent, p. 79)

#### 3. Canaan “rest” (Hb. “nuwach” Gr. “katapausin”)(Num. 13; 14:28-30; Deut. 12:10; 25:19; Josh 1:13; 11:23-24; 21:44; 22:4; 23:1; Ps. 95:7-11; Heb. 3:11,18; 4:5,8)

This rest was to occur at the entrance into the promised land, which was the land of Canaan. God promised this “rest” to Israel, via Joshua. The rest was tied to obedience (Deut. 28:1-14), however, Israel refused to enter into the land, (Deut. 1:19-33; Heb. 4:3,5,6). The rest in the land was a picture of deliverance from the bondage and slavery in Egypt and to freedom and peace in the Lord’s new provision. This “rest” is mentioned in our section of study in the book of Hebrews, (Heb. 3:11,18; 4:5,8).

#### 4. Eternal “rest” (Gr. “katapausis,” “sabbatismos”)(Heb. 4:1-2,9)

This rest is given to the church. There is no “Sabbath” (seventh-day holy day) rest for the church, (Rom. 14:5; Gal. 4:10; Col. 2:16) because this rest was given specifically to Israel as a mark of the Mosaic Law and Covenant. The writer of Hebrews states, “another day” (Gr. “allos”) is for the church, (Heb. 4:8). The “us” (Heb. 4:2) and the “we” (Heb. 4:3) are the “people of God” or the “church.” The contrast between this “eternal rest” of Christ and the “Canaan rest” of Joshua is that the “church” is to enter into Christ’s “rest” by ceasing from our own works

for salvation and trust in His finished work, (Heb. 4:10). If there is a “progressive act” of keeping a “Sabbath-rest” (Heb. 4:9) it is a moment-by-moment rest in the finished work of Christ, entered into by faith and the ceasing of our own works. These Jews who had trusted in Christ, wanted to leave the church and go back to Judaism. This would be a failure of belief and a failure to enter into Christ’s rest.

**5. Millennial “rest”** (Gr. “katapasusis” “sabbatismos”) (Isa. 30:15; Jer. 6:16; 31:2,25; Ps. 95:7-11; Heb. 4:1-2;9) The word “today” (Heb. 4:7-8) for Israel is their future life to come in the Millennial Kingdom, (Jer. 31:2). The word “them” (Heb. 4:2) and “to whom it was first preached” (Heb. 4:6) refers to the “people of God” as Israel. “But the failure of the Israelites did not nullify the truth that some entered that rest, and accordingly God renewed the offer (in Ps. 95) as late as the time of David. At that time God again set a certain day, calling it ‘Today,’ thus presenting this opportunity to all readers of the Psalm for whom the ‘Today’ becomes their own ‘Today.’” (Hodges, p. 789) The promise that remains (Heb. 4:1); the “rest” that remains (Heb. 4:8) and the “entering into His rest through belief” (Heb. 4:11; Mt. 11:28-29) refers to Israel. The rest is not a left over perpetual promise of keeping the holy seventh-day Sabbath, but rather a promise of entering “His” rest (Heb. 4:1) by trusting in the Lord of the Sabbath (Mt. 11:28).

### **The warning connected to the “rest”**

The words “let us” applies the “rest” to the reader. “The use of a hortatory subjunctive is common when a writer intends to call his hearers from one mode of life or disposition to another.” (Lane, p. 97)

1. “Let us fear lest...” (Gr. “phobethomen” 4:1 first aorist passive subjunctive)

“The emphatic position of [fear] (Gr. “phobethomen”) ‘let us begin to fear’ at the beginning of the paragraph implies that the attitude toward the Word of God in Scripture within the community has not been acceptable.” (Lane, p. 97) This explains why the writer states what he does in 4:2 and 4:12.

2. “Let us therefore be diligent...” (Gr. “spoudasomen” 4:11) In a sense we must labor to be at rest. The thought is expressing our belief and keep on believing.

### **Two factors kept people from the “rest.”**

1. “Disobedience” (Gr. “apeitheia” 4:6,11) by not following the Lord’s Word.

2. “Unbelief” (Gr. “apistia” 3:19)

“The principle that unbelief invited exclusion from God’s rest (3:19) remains valid in the present and assumes profound significance when rest is understood in this eschatological sense.” (Lane, p. 99) The writer states belief was not mixed with the Word. The words, “not being mixed” (Gr. “sugkerannumi”) mean “to unite one thing to another.” (Wuest, p. 84) The Word and faith didn’t mix in order to profit them.

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