

**HEBREWS 15
(Hebrews 4:1-13)**

**CHRIST IS BETTER THAN JOSHUA
By Ron Harvey**

INTRODUCTION

In proving that Christianity is better than Judaism, the writer of Hebrews goes about his business of proving that Christ is better than all those giants of the Old Testament.

He is better than the prophets. (1:1) He is better than angels. (1:4) He is better than Moses who led the people out of Egypt. (3:3) And now we come to consider that Christ is better than Joshua who led the people into the Promised Land. (4:8)

Take a look at Hebrews 4:8 and let me point out that when it says Jesus it is not talking about Christ but it is talking about Joshua. Jesus, of course is the Greek spelling of the Hebrew name Joshua. But in this context it is Joshua that is referenced. So when we quote this verse I will use the name Joshua rather than Jesus.

Moses led the people out of Egypt and he led the people during the wilderness wanderings. But Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. It was Joshua who took the reigns over Israel and Joshua led them across the Jordan into the land of Canaan – that land flowing with milk and honey.

And some of the Jews might have supposed that this good land was the ultimate rest for the people of God and that Joshua was that ultimate Savior of the people.

But not so says Hebrews 4:8.

For if (Joshua) had given them rest, then would he (David) not afterward have spoken of another day.

Now we need to distinguish these rests that are spoken of here in Hebrews.

Distinguishing the rests in Hebrews

First, take a look at Hebrews 4:4. And there we find that,

1. There was a rest which is associated with the creation of the world. (4:4)

For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works.

This was and is the great rest of God. It was a cessation from his creative work. And no work will ever compare to the work that God did in creation and no rest will ever compare to His rest when he rested from his work.

Now down through history, man has accomplished some phenomenal works. He has built huge, skyscrapers that reach nearly to heaven.

Example: When I was younger I played chess and one of my greatest adventures as a teenager was when I went by myself to New York City for a chess tournament. And while I was there I went up to the top of the Empire State Building. And when I made my way all the way to the top I looked down from that massive building and the people and the cars below looked like ants. And when you are at the top of a building like that you can't help but wonder, "How did man accomplish this great feat?" It is just an absolutely astonishing work.

Example: Man has laid cable under the ocean floor extending across the continents. And that is an awesome work.

Example: Man has walked on the moon. And that is a mind-bobbling work.

But the work of God was infinitely greater than all of this. God created all things. And he created it out of nothing. And he did it in six days. And when he had completed all of this creative work, there was a glorious rest in which God ceased from his work. It was finished. (v.3)

Now I want you to notice something about these creative days.

In Genesis 1:5, it says,

The evening and the morning were the first day.

And in verse 8, the evening and the morning were the second day. In verse 13, the evening and the morning were the third day. The evening and the morning were the fourth day in verse 19, the fifth day in verse 23 and the sixth day in verse 31. All of these days were defined by that expression, “the evening and the morning.”

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.

Genesis 2:1,2

Now it should not be supposed that God was tired after his creation. For our God is never tired. His strength is never used up. He is eternally omnipotent. He doesn't use up his strength as we do.

Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary.

Isaiah 40:28

So it is the wrong conception if you suppose that God was weary and needed a rest to renew his strength.

But it should be supposed that God was very pleased with his work and he entered into an eternal enjoyment of that work. If I can use a human expression, “He sat down and admired his work.”

Now we have seen that the first six days of creation are defined by an evening and a morning. But the seventh day is not defined in this way. It just says “on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made and he rested.” (Gen.2:2)

This is God's rest – when he rested from his creative work. And it is an eternal rest. There is no evening and morning to this last day. God will enjoy his rest for all eternity. By his great and wondrous power he created the heavens and the earth and then he finished his creative work. And he is finished forever. And how peaceful is his rest because his work is

thoroughly good and complete.

God is resting today. He is not continuing to create the universe. He has finished his work and his rest goes on and on and on.

Now God does many other works. Hebrews has instructed us that Jesus himself upholds all things by the word of his power. (1:3) So, his rest is not a state of inactivity. But it is a state of great satisfaction and enjoyment from which he will never retire. God's rest is a perfect state of bliss and contentment.

Now this glorious rest of God is that rest which God himself has enjoyed since the foundation of the world. It is a rest of great satisfaction and accomplishment. It is a rest of stupendous pleasure and fulfillment. And it is a rest of super-abounding glory.

Example: The New York Giants and Eli Manning just won the super bowl. And they now have the entire off season to glory in their accomplishment. And there will be ticker-tape parades and banquets and award presentations and acceptance speeches. And everywhere they go people will say, "There goes the greatest team in all of football." And in a sense, they have entered into their rest. It is a glorious rest. All of their labors that resulted in their victory are completed and they now glory in their accomplishment.

And God has entered into his glorious rest. All created creatures will give God ticker-tape parades for all eternity. Forever angels will marvel at God's wondrous creation and this will bring glory and honor to God forever and ever. And God has entered into this glorious coronation and celebration called his rest.

And the seventh day has no evening and no morning because it is an eternal rest for our God.

And so the first and most glorious rest that is discussed in Hebrews is God's eternal rest.

2. There is another rest mentioned in Hebrews. But this next rest is not really another rest at all. It is the same glorious rest which God himself enjoys. It has the same pleasures and the same satisfactions. It is filled

with great glory and honor. And it is the rest that is promised to those that believe in Jesus.

What? You say. I may enjoy the benefits of that same, glorious rest that God himself enjoys? O wretched man that I am? I shall enjoy all of the glories and pleasures associated with God's rest?

And the writer of Hebrews says, "Yes!" It is God's rest that you shall enjoy. All of the wondrous pleasures that God has reserved for himself shall also be poured out and shared with those who believe on his Son.

This is too amazing that God's rest is offered to human beings like you and me. And if I can say, it is more than an offer, it is a promise.

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest . . .

Hebrews 4:1

You see God has done more than merely make us an empty offer. If God merely offered us his rest, none of us would take it because our sin is too compelling, our guilt is too overwhelming and we have no ability to lay hold of the offer.

But God has done more than offer his rest to us. He has promised it. And because God has promised his rest, that means that some will attain it.

Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein.

Hebrews 4:6

Has God promised a rest? Then some must be the glad recipients of that promise. Can it be that God would promise a rest and none would enter into that rest?

Example: God promised Israel the land of Canaan which was an earthly rest. And many died in the wilderness and did not lay hold of that rest. But some did. Because when God makes a promise it is without repentance. God doesn't change his mind and he never fails to fulfill his promises. And God has promised that some will enter into his rest.

And he has promised it to the people of God.

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.
Hebrews 4:9

This rest shall never be attained by those who are not his people. But it shall surely be entered by the people of God. God doesn't allow people into his rest on the basis of works, but he allows people into his rest on the basis of the heavenly calling. (See, Hebrews 3:1)

Has God called you with the heavenly calling? Then his rest is for you and one glorious day you will enter in.

But how shall you enter in given that you are a sinner against God and you are thoroughly unworthy?

You will enter in by faith and by faith alone.

So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. (3:19)

For we which have believed do enter into rest. (4:3)

And what grace is this? God's rest, that eternal and glorious rest of God, is offered to sinners like you and I.

God's rest will be thoroughly populated with sinners who simply believed in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

This is the gospel of Jesus Christ. He died for sinners. And he will make you righteous in God's eyes if you simply believe in Him.

You see in Hebrews 4:1, there is a promise that is given to us and that promise is the promise of entering into his rest.

Now the human mind cannot conceive of the eternal and infinite joy and pleasure of this rest. It is the very rest of God that is promised to us. Perhaps that is why Paul said,

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

I Cor. 2:9

What has God prepared for us? It is His own glorious rest. Whatever joys and pleasures are associated with his rest, we shall have it as well, if we simply believe in Jesus.

So, there is the rest of God - that eternal rest which God enjoys after his creative work. And then there is the rest which is promised to his people which is really the same rest which God enjoys. He says, There remaineth a rest to the people of God.

Those are the only two rests are ultimately meaningful to the people of God.

And then there are those other rests in Hebrews which typify that great rest of God and his people.

3. There was the rest of entering into the land of Canaan.

This was the great promise to that people Israel – that God would bring them into a land of rest. Now this was obviously an earthly promise. And it was a promise that was never realized by those people that Moses brought out of Egypt (except for Joshua and Caleb). In their hardness of heart, they refused to believe God and so God left them to die in the wilderness never to come into the rest of Canaan. This is the rest spoken of in Hebrews 3:11.

So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.

Hebrews 3:11

Now this is speaking of that earthly rest. And it says, “They shall not enter in.” That is, those who did not believe in the wilderness will not enter in.

This is that rest to which Joshua would lead the next generation of Israel. Joshua was that Captain that would lead the next generation across the Jordan and into Canaan after that wicked generation fell in the wilderness.

Joshua was a courageous man who believed God and trusted God to deliver them from the hands of giants and many enemy nations in Canaan. But as great as Joshua was, he was not the Christ. Joshua led his people into an earthly land. Christ leads his people to a heavenly land. Joshua led his people into an earthly rest. Christ leads his people into a heavenly rest.

Now this earthly rest was not that great rest of God which God has promised to his people. Joshua's rest is that lesser rest. Joshua's rest is that typical rest. And Joshua's rest, in comparison to Christ's rest, can hardly be called a rest at all.

In Joshua's rest there were enemies on every hand. There were "ites" around every corner. Furthermore, in Joshua's rest, there was only temporary peace and joy from time to time.

And our text clearly subordinates the rest associated with Joshua to the rest associated with Christ.

For if Jesus (Joshua) had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.

Hebrews 4:8

If Joshua had given them rest, then there would not have been another day (another rest) mentioned by David some 500 years later.

Now the writer of Hebrews is saying, "OK, Hebrew Christians, do you aspire to go back to Judaism? Are you thinking about leaving Christ and going back to that old covenant? Do you prefer Joshua's rest to Christ's rest?"

You see, if Joshua's rest had been so wonderful, then there would have been no need for another rest. Compared to the real rest, Joshua's rest is no rest at all.

For if Joshua had given them rest, then he would not afterward have spoken of another day. (v.8)

But since David, through the Holy Spirit, did speak of another day (another rest) then that suggests that Joshua did not really give them rest.

Joshua's rest was merely a typical rest. It was rest for a moment. It was incomplete rest at best. But Christ's rest – Ah, Christ's rest is the very rest of God which God entered after creation.

So, Joshua's rest was merely a type and should not be aspired to as though it is the reality.

And there was another typical rest in the Old Testament.

4. There was the rest of the Sabbath.

Now the Sabbath Day was a commemorative rest because it commemorated God resting on the seventh day. And so it was for a memorial. Every time the Jews observed a Sabbath they remembered that God has entered into his rest. But it also was a forecast of that promised rest which God's people shall enjoy in eternity.

Now when the Jews celebrated their Sabbath days, it was a very temporary celebration and then they returned to work. And this is because the Sabbath Day was not that true rest which God's people shall enjoy eternally and forever and permanently, but was a typical rest that foreshadowed that true rest.

Now we have distinguished the various rests of Hebrews and let's summarize by saying that there is one great rest – it is God's rest. It is that very rest that God celebrated when he created the worlds and then ceased from creating. It is that state of eternal joy and peace and glory that is earned and deserved only by God himself. And it is the very same rest that is promised to his beloved people – that is us, who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. All other rests come so far short of that rest that they are counted as no rest at all.

The Principle of God's Rest Stated

For we which have believed do enter into rest.

Hebrews 4:3

Many, many people and commentators have stumbled over this verse and they have used this verse to argue that the rest described here in Hebrews is some present rest or peace of mind that believers find in Christ.

And there is no doubt that there is such a present rest for believers. But that is not the message of Hebrews. The message of Hebrews 4 is that there is an ultimate rest, an eternal rest for believers.

So, what does it mean when it says, *we which have believed do enter into rest?*

This verse states an abstract principle. It does not suggest when the rest is realized, but rather, that rest is universally tied to faith.

Let's state it another way.

Who does go into rest? Believers.

Now it is clear that those in the wilderness did not enter into that typical rest. They died in the wilderness. And they did not enter their rest because of unbelief.

So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.
Hebrews 3:19

But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

Hebrews 4:2

So what is the undeniable principle of God's rest? It is that God's rest is for believers. Unbelievers do not enter in, believers enter in.

Now we have seen from our text that there was a rest for the people of Israel and most of those who came out of Egypt did not enter in. And they didn't enter in because they did not believe God.

So, what is the present state of affairs? Is there a rest to be entered? And the answer is found in verse 9.

There remaineth a rest for the people of God

But it is our present duty to make sure that we enter into that rest. There is a most glorious heaven that is prepared where we will cease from our labors. But that glorious heaven is for now merely a promise in the

heart of God. And it is our duty to lay hold of it by faith.

Labour therefore to enter into that rest.

Hebrew 4:11

That is a very interesting way to put it. And you might think that means that you must work to get there – that you must accumulate many good works in order to buy your way into God’s rest. And that couldn’t be further from the truth.

This word labor means to “make haste.” It means don’t delay. Put all of your attention into entering into his rest.

Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ wholeheartedly and with a steadfast faith? Then you have laid hold of that eternal rest. But if you do not yet believe, then make haste. There is nothing you must do but believe in Christ.

An Illustration of Faith

Back on June 30, 1859, a man by the name of Charles Blondin (1824-1897), really Jean Francois Gravelet, accomplished an amazing feat. He crossed Niagara Falls on a tightrope. He crossed on a 3 inch manila rope stretched 1,100 feet across the falls at a height of 160 feet. Not only that but in the ensuing days he also accomplished these amazing feats while crossing the falls: he executed a backwards somersault, crossed while blindfolded, while pushing a wheelbarrow, on stilts, in the dark with Roman candles flaring from the ends of his balancing pole, and one time even stopped half way across and cooked an omelet on a portable stove and lowered it to a boat below him.



Then on September 15, 1860, he accomplished his most amazing feat of all and it went something like this:

Before crossing the rope on that particular day Charles Blondin turned to the crowd and said, "Do you believe I can carry someone across the rope on my back?" The crowd roared its approval, "Yes, we believe you can!"

Then Charles asked for a volunteer, "Who will volunteer?" The crowd was silent. He then pointed out one man standing nearby, "How about you?" The man said, "Hardly, you don't think I am going to risk my life like that, do you?" and he turned away.

Next Charles pointed out another man, "And what about you?" The man replied, "I believe. In fact, I have no doubt at all." Charles said, "Will you trust me?" The man replied, "I will!"

The man then proceeded to climb on the back of Charles Blondin and they headed across the falls. The crowd waited breathlessly while they crossed and roared their approval once they completed the crossing. What they didn't know was that the man who crossed on Blondin's back was Harry Colcord, his manager. You see Harry Colcord knew how good Charles Blondin was and fully trusted him. His faith was sure because the object of his faith, Charles Blondin, was trustworthy and had proven himself so over the years.¹

Jesus Christ is the object of our faith. He has proven Himself trustworthy. He created the world we live in. He came and lived a blameless life without sin. He served and sacrificed, even to the point of dying on the cross for our sin. Then He overcame death and arose from the dead because He was God who came in the flesh. He has power over death and power over life. He is worthy of our trust.

Would you trust Jesus to carry you across to that great land that awaits the people of God?

All you have to do is trust Him!