

the whole context of this “*Sabbath-rest*” passage with, “if we hold fast” (3:6), followed by the infamous example of *unbelief* in Scripture—the “Exodus generation” of the Jews (3:7-11). His purpose is to warn these Hebrews who have “*professed*” faith in Christ (see 3:1; 4:14 & 10:23), that they too could lose everything if they do not persevere in faith. Psalm 95 is his text which closes with this thought: “**entering into God’s rest**” (v11). That is to be his resounding theme throughout this entire setting of Hebrews 3 & 4 (3:11,18; 4:1,3-5,8-11). He warns, challenges and presses these Hebrew believers to “**enter into God’s rest.**”

The Exodus Generation was not allowed to “enter God’s rest”—the Promised Land. Hebrews 3 interprets this to mean that they *did not obtain salvation*. Entering the Promised Land was a *physical picture of believing and entering salvation*, resting from reliance on good works to earn God’s favor. The Israelites were unwilling to trust and obey God; they lost a physical inheritance. The Holy Spirit interprets this as a warning for people who refuse to trust in Christ alone for salvation.

“**God’s rest**” in Hebrews 3 is quite different from “**God’s rest**” in Hebrews 4. When God says, “*They shall not enter into my rest*” (3:11,18), the Old Covenant is in view, and the Promised Land is signified. But in chapter 4 when the apostle speaks of “*us entering into his rest*” (v1), and “*we* which have believed do enter into rest” (v3), and “it remaineth that some must enter therein” (v6), and “there remaineth a rest to the people of God” (v9), and “let us labour therefore to enter into that rest” (v11), *now we have something totally different!* No longer is anything *physical* such as “land” to be entered. The apostle has moved from Old Covenant type (chp3) to New Covenant reality (chp4), and now “entering God’s rest” is *spiritual* through *believing the gospel!*—“We which have believed do enter into rest” (v3).

Now let’s see this whole context a little clearer (3:6–4:11) by listing those the apostle has included in this passage:

- (1) **God’s Rest/Seventh-day of Creation** (4:3,4)
- (2) **Exodus Generation** (3:7-11,15-19)
- (3) **Joshua’s Generation** (4:8)
- (4) **David’s Generation** (3:7-11; 4:7)
- (5) **The New Generation** (3:6,12-14; 4:1-3,6,9-11)

Joshua is only brought in briefly to show that while he did take Israel into the Promised Land and they were given “rest” from their physical enemies (Joshua 24:43-45), he never gave them *true spiritual rest* (Heb 4:8,9). **David** has a greater role to play. The apostle capitalizes upon his words of warning in Psalm 95 as David calls upon his own generation to *enter God’s rest:* (3:7-11)

Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as...in the wilderness: when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years...I was grieved with that generation ...So I swear in my wrath, They shall not *enter into my rest*.

Now we come to **God’s rest** on the seventh day: “And God did rest the seventh day from all his works” (4:4; Gen 2:2). This is brought into this passage because “God’s rest” is not only related to the physical rest of Canaan, but more especially to the main topic of this whole discussion—*Salvation rest*.

“**FAITH**” IS THE KEY

Sabbath-keepers who give Hebrews 4 a superficial reading are tempted to use God’s “seventh-day rest” mentioned here as an argument that verse 9 supports a “seventh-day rest”—“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” Both of the following things can come to mind as this text is read when the reader comes across God’s resting on the seventh day: (1) something *physical*; the idea of working six days and then resting on the seventh; (2) something *spiritual*; the idea of striving to please God by works, and then through believing the gospel, coming to rest in the finished work of Christ. Both of these have works then rest. The context of Hebrews 4 is the only thing that can tell us *why* the apostle mentions God’s resting on the seventh day. Is it to reinforce a New Testament directive in verse 9 that Christians *literally* rest on the seventh day? Or is it brought in here illustrating a *spiritual* truth that all men by nature trust in their own works-based relationship with God, till by his grace, they give it all up, and “*cease from their own works, as God did from his*” and trust in Christ? (4:10)

I wish all Bible questions were this easy to answer! The apostle’s message from start to finish is “**faith.**” Keeping a Sabbath day is nothing but “**works**”—“the works of the law” (Rom 9:32). It’s that simple! No matter how far you stretch this text, you’ll never get “**law-keeping**” to fit into “**believing.**” One of the most basic Bible truths is: “**the law is not of faith**” (Gal 3:12). Faith permeates this text completely. “*Resting*” in this entire passage is inseparably tied to “*believing.*” Nothing here is about doing anything in a physical sense, it’s all *spiritual*. Even as coming to Jesus and receiving of him, it’s all *spiritual*. “Come unto me...and **I will give you rest**” (Matt 11:28)—*spiritual rest!* The opposite of this is found in keeping the Sabbath day. It wasn’t *spiritual*; it was complete *physical* rest, *outward* obedience to *law*: doing no work, carrying no load, making no fire, no cooking, no buying or selling, or going out of one’s place. The idea of “faith” was *never* linked with the Sabbath. But Hebrews 4 says: “We which have believed do enter into rest” (v3). Believed what? “**The Gospel of Christ!**” (v2). What we have here is **a Gospel rest** that’s completely characterized by *faith*, and contrasted with *works!* Take a look at it: (3:12–4:11)

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of *unbelief*, in departing from the living God...that they should *not enter into his rest*, but to them that *believed not?* So we see that they *could not enter in because of unbelief*. Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of *entering into his rest*, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was *the gospel preached*, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, *not being mixed with faith* in them that heard it. For *we which have believed do enter into rest*...Seeing therefore it *remaineth that some must enter therein*, and they to whom it was first preached *entered not in because of unbelief*... **There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.** For he that is *entered into his rest*, he also hath *ceased from his own works*, as God did from his. *Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest*, lest any man fall after the same example of *unbelief*.

Faith is the **foundation** of this entire text from start to finish. Anytime you begin to think of a literal, physical “rest” when

you read verse 9, know for a certainty that you’re “**off**” the **foundation**, and have *nothing* to stand on. The apostle literally plasters this passage with “believing” over half-a-dozen times! He’s determined, in this crucial *New Covenant* “Sabbath” discourse, that he’ll not be misunderstood by his *Jewish* readers. Those who see a literal “seventh-day” rest in verse 9 see this *through verse 4*, and not through the entire passage: “And God did rest the seventh day from all his works” (v4). This is where their focus is. They’ve isolated these two verses and actually lifted them *out of their context* in order to give this a *literal* “Sabbath” interpretation: “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God” (v9). If they would leave verse 9 in its proper setting, surrounded by “**faith**” on every side, then they may begin to see that God’s “**works**” and “**rest**” are in this passage to *illustrate the way of salvation*, that sinners must “cease from their own works, as God did from his” (v10) and “enter into his rest” (v1) by trusting in Christ alone.

It seems rather obvious that verse 9 in no way supports a Sabbath-day rest. The generations listed in this text: **David’s, Joshua’s, and the Exodus Generation, did not enter** into God’s rest, yet *they all kept the Sabbath!* Thus, the Sabbath cannot possibly be *the rest* spoken of in verse 9! *They kept the Sabbath*, yet *did not* enter into rest. So if the Sabbath is *not* what is meant by God’s rest when it comes to the generations which *lead up to verse 9*, then naturally the Sabbath *is not the rest* spoken of *in verse 9!* If the Sabbath is not the *rest* in the **type** and **picture in the Old Testament** (chp3), then the Sabbath is certainly not the *rest* of the **reality and fulfillment in the New Testament!** (chp4)

Seeing therefore it remaineth that *some must enter therein*, and they to whom it was first preached *entered not in* because of unbelief: Again, he limiteth a certain day, *saying in David, Today, after so long a time*; as it is said, *Today* if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For *if Joshua had given them rest*, then would he not afterward have spoken of *another day*. **There remaineth therefore a rest** to the people of God. (4:6-9)

Notice how verse 6 and verse 9 are linked by the two words, “remaineth therefore.” This shows that verse 9 is *interwoven* with the entire context and must not be read all by itself. This is *all one continuous thought* that’s bound up in “*believing the gospel*” (v2), and “*we which have believed do enter into rest*” (v3). This is the *rest* that *remains* for the people of God in verse 9!

The word “rest” in verse 9 is *sabbatismos*—in most Bibles translated “Sabbath rest”—and it’s used only once in God’s Word. It is not the same as “Sabbath” elsewhere in the New Testament, *sabbaton*, meaning “the Sabbath.” It is a unique word coined by the apostle for this unique passage only. As he demonstrates in Hebrews that the New Covenant is *better* than the Old, I believe the idea he is portraying here is that the Sabbath (*sabbatismos*) of the New Covenant is *better* than the Sabbath (*sabbaton*) of the Old Covenant! Here is a brief word from VINE’S EXPOSITORY DICTIONARY:

Sabbatismos—“a Sabbath-keeping,” here the sabbath-keeping is the perpetual sabbath “rest” to be enjoyed uninterruptedly by believers in their fellowship with the Father and the Son, in contrast to the weekly Sabbath under the Law.

Following God’s work of creation, he *rested*. “God’s rest” was promised to believers: “a *promise* of entering into his rest” (4:1). His promise still stands: “Today” (4:7) is still “Today!” “Exhort one another daily, while it is called *Today*” (3:13). This “rest” is related to “God’s Sabbath rest” (vv 4&10); it is a rest of **satisfaction**, not a rest following weariness. Yet if verse 9 has to do with *needing rest* after working 6 days, then this passage is saying that *God needed a rest!* Think about it! These rests are related; they are either a rest of satisfaction, or a needed rest after working! Verse 9 *cannot* be teaching a *literal Sabbath rest!* God was not tired or exhausted after his work of creation; his *resting* has to do with the idea of **completion** and **satisfaction**, a “**Sabbath of the soul.**” The end of each of the first six days are recorded in Genesis, but not the seventh: “the evening and the morning were...” (vv 5,8,13,19,23,31). God “rested” the seventh day, a rest *not ending with* the seventh day, but *beginning then*, and still continuing, into which believers enter.

What we’re seeing here in Hebrews is a clear *contrast* of the finished work of God at creation followed by his rest, and the finished work of Christ at Calvary followed by his rest! The *old* creation: “the works were *finished*...and God did *rest*” (vv 3,4); the *new* creation: Jesus cried, “It is *finished*” (John 19:30), and he did *rest*: “after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God” (Heb 10:12). Believers enter into the *rest* of a *finished* and *complete* atonement. The work is done! Jesus sat down! “He that is entered into his rest, he also hath *ceased from his own works*, as God did from his” (v10). No longer are we striving to be accepted of God by “works of righteousness” (Titus 3:5), we’re looking unto Jesus! “But to him that *worketh not*, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom 4:5).

What the Old Covenant couldn’t do in repeated sacrifices, the New Covenant has completed with one sacrifice: “For by one offering he hath *perfected forever* them that are sanctified” (Heb 10:14). He “bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24). Entering into this *rest* is believing and knowing that you are “*complete in him*” (Col 2:10), and being completely **satisfied!** It’s entering into *his rest, his satisfaction*: “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be **satisfied**...for *he shall bear* their iniquities” (Isaiah 53:11). Believing in Christ brings peace and rest. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). Believers are *perfectly* “accepted in the beloved” (Eph 1:6). This is gospel rest at its best!

Let’s move on now to our next segment. As you turn the page, you’ll be met with a chart that documents how the Seventh-day Adventist (**SDA**) Church leaders are not ashamed to do some double-dealing with our text, swinging it whichever way they want to in order to achieve the best results. In their “*official*” statements of faith you’ll see them speak the truth about this “rest” in Hebrews 4:9, that it’s a spiritual rest, a gospel rest, a rest of grace and faith; but when it comes to their “*unofficial*” writings, their tracts, their honesty with this text seems to fall by the wayside, and for reasons of their own, they dish out to their readers something altogether different!

SDA OFFICIAL TEACHING IN THEIR BOOKS

This text does not teach a Sabbath-keeping rest:
“**There remains, then, a sabbath-rest for the people of God**”—Hebrews 4:9 NIV

THE SDA BIBLE COMMENTARY

“The rest here spoken of is the *rest of grace... spiritual rest*” (Vol 7, p 88)

FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINES OF THE SDA CHURCH

“This rest is a *spiritual rest*... All who have entered this rest—the *saving grace received by faith* in Jesus Christ—have ceased every effort to achieve righteousness by their own works... It is into this rest that God calls His people... entering into *the gospel rest*... this *rest of grace and faith*” (SDA Believe, p 291)

This text does not teach a Sabbath-keeping rest!

A CLEAR CONTRADICTION BY THE SDA — A DELIBERATE DECEPTION!

BLOWIN’ THE WHISTLE ON THE SDA!

The **SDA** leaders are fully aware that Hebrews 4:9 is not speaking about a seventh-day Sabbath rest. They also know that this text must be set forth truthfully in their official doctrinal standards. If it is not, they know they’ll be exposed by the Evangelical community. They also know that these **SDA** statements of faith are *not* what Adventists will show to the people whom they’re evangelizing. The millions of people around the world that Adventists contact each year will not see these “books” written by **SDA** leaders—but *they will see SDA* “tracts.” Tracts on “the Sabbath” will be left with them to read and to study. So, in this way, the *truth* that’s taught by the **SDA** Church on this key “New Testament” passage *will not be seen* by these potential converts.

This is a very cunning tactic of these **SDA** leaders. They realize that if these people knew what they *really* teach on Hebrews 4:9 in their official writings, that this text could not be used in their evangelism to promote Sabbath-day keeping. Adventists would be *robbed* of a powerful “New Testament” weapon they pack in their arsenal. They could no longer pull this text out of their “bag of tricks.” The **SDA** leaders can also easily deny responsibility if questioned about this “contradiction” in their literature by shifting the blame to the individual who wrote the tract. They can point at him as the one who “erred” in his interpretation of this text, while at the same time clearing themselves of any wrong doing by pointing to their official statements to show that *they* said it “right.” But this whole thing is nothing more than a game they play, a clever strategy designed to mislead people in order to get them into their church. Everyone knows that these same **SDA** leaders are the very ones that *oversee* and *approve* of all **SDA** material that goes into print—including *tracts*. They are all involved in

SDA UNOFFICIAL TEACHING IN THEIR TRACTS

This text does teach a Sabbath-keeping rest:
“**There remains, then, a sabbath-rest for the people of God**”—Hebrews 4:9 NIV

TRACT— “THE LORD’S DAY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT”

“‘So then, there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God’ (Heb 4:9) ... *so a Sabbath-keeping rest still exists every seventh day* for God’s people in New Testament times” (Review and Herald Publishing, Good News Series, # 13)

TRACT— “SABBATH REST” (Light Bearers Ministry)

“Paul taught that ‘there remaineth therefore a rest (*the Sabbath*) to the people of God’ (Heb 4:9); the Greek word translated ‘rest’ in this text is ‘sabbatismos,’ and literally means *Sabbath*. *Jesus never set aside God’s Sabbath*”

This text does teach a Sabbath-keeping rest!

this *deception* which they perpetrate upon people who are ignorant of the Scriptures.

Thus, the **SDA** Church is purposefully promoting a contradiction to win converts. You see, you don’t hear everything they say. Some of what they say is spoken “officially” in their formal statements of faith; and some of what they say is spoken “unofficially” in their tracts. When they’re seeking to convert you, their whole design with this passage is for you to hear only what they say *unofficially* in their tracts. That’s the bait on their hook they’re using to catch you. And once you’re caught and pulled into the boat (into the **SDA** Church), you might eventually notice how you were initially misled on this “Sabbath-rest” passage in Hebrews; but by the time that may happen you will then be so indoctrinated with the whole barrage of **SDA** teaching that it won’t really matter that they “pulled the wool over your eyes” on this particular passage, because by then you will have already swallowed so much of their slanted and peculiar “Sabbath” viewpoints on other passages that *there’ll be no turning back*. That was their design all along—their strategy worked! They fooled you.

DO YOU KEEP IT, OR HAVE YOU ENTERED IN?

It’s amusing to hear someone use this text and say that it’s teaching us to “*keep*” the Sabbath, especially when the word *keep* is not even there; in fact, it’s not found in the entire book of Hebrews. It’s “**enter**.” We “**enter in**.” These words are not interchangeable; they have very different meanings. “*Keep*” is always used in connection with the Sabbath, never “enter.”

- “Remember the sabbath day, to *keep* it” (Exod 20:8)
- “The children of Israel shall *keep* the sabbath” (Exod 31:16)
- “*Keep* the sabbath day to sanctify it” (Deut 5:12)
- “...because he *keepeth* not the sabbath day” (John 9:16)

- “Blessed is the man... that *keepeth* the sabbath from polluting it, and *keepeth* his hand from doing any evil” (Isaiah 56:2)

This last reference shows clearly that these words cannot be swapped around. A person doesn’t “*enter*” the sabbath from polluting it” any more than he would “*enter*” his hand from doing evil.” This is how comical it is to force “*keeping* the Sabbath” into this Hebrews 4 context of “*entering* into his rest.”

- “They shall not *enter* into my rest” (Hebrews 3:11)
- “...that they should not *enter* into his rest” (3:18)
- “...they could not *enter* in because of unbelief” (3:19)
- “...do *enter* into rest... *enter* into my rest” (4:3)
- “If they shall *enter* into my rest” (4:5)
- “...it remaineth that some must *enter* therein, and... to whom it was first preached *entered* not in because of unbelief” (4:6)
- “Let us labour therefore to *enter* into that rest” (4:11)

Many things are *entered into* in the Bible, but *never the Sabbath!*

- “...*enter into his sanctuary*” (2 Chron 30:8)
- “*Enter into his gates* with thanksgiving” (Psalms 100:4)
- “...*enter into the land of Israel*” (Ezek 20:38)
- “Jonah began to *enter into the city*” (Jonah 3:4)
- “...when thou prayest, *enter into thy closet*” (Matt 6:6)
- “*Enter ye in at the strait gate*” (Matt 7:13)
- “...*enter into the kingdom of God*” (Acts 14:22)

But *nowhere* is it said to “enter” into *the Sabbath!* It’s always “keep.” “*Keep* the Sabbath” is just like many other things in the Bible to *keep*; but these things are to *keep*, not to *enter*:

- “*keep the passover*” (Exod 12:48)
- “*keep the feast*” (Exod 23:15)
- “*keep the charge of the Lord*” (Lev 8:35)
- “*keep my statutes*” (Lev 18:5)
- “*keep the law*” (1 Chron 22:12)
- “*keep thy word*” (Psalms 119:17)
- “*keep my commandments*” (John 15:10)

Keep and *enter* are not the same; both have their own distinct meaning; and to substitute one for the other in order to swing a text your way is to *deliberately ignore* basic rules of language. These examples that I’ve given demonstrate how *improper* and *unscriptural* it is to swap these two words back and forth.

The rest that remains is **Salvation rest!** “Come unto me... and I will give you *rest*... ye shall find *rest unto your souls*” (Matt 11:28). This passage in Hebrews is about persevering in faith—trusting Christ through difficult times. It is not teaching that there still remains a “Sabbath day” rest each week for God’s people. Nor is it about encouraging believers to rest one day out of every seven as God did when he created the world. This text is about *ceasing to trust in our own works*, and entering God’s rest by *trusting in the work of Christ alone* to save us, and not to shrink back in unbelief. □

—Dan Shankles

Salvation Rest

There is a passage in the New Testament that appears at first glance to support the keeping of a Sabbath-day rest: “There remains, then, a **Sabbath-rest** for the people of God” (Heb 4:9 NIV). This text has often been presented to me as a “*New Testament*” directive for Sabbath observance. I will have to admit, it does have a good “Sabbath-ring” to it! Sitting there all by itself, it’s pretty convincing. But that’s the catch—it’s not “all by itself.” In fact, nothing is *all by itself* in the Word of God! Every passage is placed by the Holy Spirit in its own carefully crafted “context” that’s designed to shed light on what it says. This text in Hebrews is no “lone cowboy” text. It’s surrounded by a whole host of words, thoughts, phrases, and other related passages that make its meaning crystal clear. Just knowing who the apostle is writing to, and why, has a way of illuminating this passage. We’ll see this as we go along.

CHRISTIANITY SURPASSES JUDAISM

The relationship of Christianity to Judaism was a critical issue in the early church. Christianity was difficult for Jews to accept. Hebrews is written to *Jewish believers* who were struggling with this new faith, and who were tempted to forsake it and turn back to Judaism for various reasons: uncertainty, the security of custom, false teaching, and persecution from both Jews and Romans. The message of Hebrews is that Christ is better, Christianity is superior, and Christ is supreme and completely sufficient for salvation. Hebrews begins by emphasizing that the old (Judaism) and the new (Christianity) are both religions revealed by God (1:1-3), with the superiority of Christ clearly demonstrated. He’s greater than the angels (1:4-2:18), greater than Moses (3:1-6), greater than the Old Testament priesthood (4:14-7:28), and the New Covenant is greater than the Old (8:1-10:18). Christianity surpasses Judaism because it has a better covenant (8:1-13), a better sanctuary (9:1-10), a more sufficient sacrifice for sins (9:11-10:18), and the apostle shows, it also has a better Sabbath! (3:7-4:11)

“ENTERING INTO GOD’S REST”

“**God’s rest**” has several meanings in Scripture: (1) the seventh day of creation and the weekly Sabbath commemorating it (Gen 2:2; Heb 4:3-4, 10; Exod 20:8-11); (2) the Promised Land, Canaan (Deut 12:9, 10; Psalm 95:8-11; Heb 3:7-11, 16-19); (3) salvation; peace with God now due to our relationship with Christ through faith (Matt 11:28-30; Heb 4:1-3, 6, 9-11); (4) our future eternal life with Christ in glory (Heb 4:9-11; Rev 14:13). All of these meanings were probably familiar to those whom the apostle wrote this letter to.

Hebrews abounds with warnings to these Jewish believers not to turn back, but to stand strong (2:1-3; 3:6-8, 12-15; 4:1, 11, 14; 6:4-6, 11, 12; 10:23, 38, 39; 12:3, 12, 13, 25). The apostle knew that many of them were on the verge of throwing it all away. So he begins