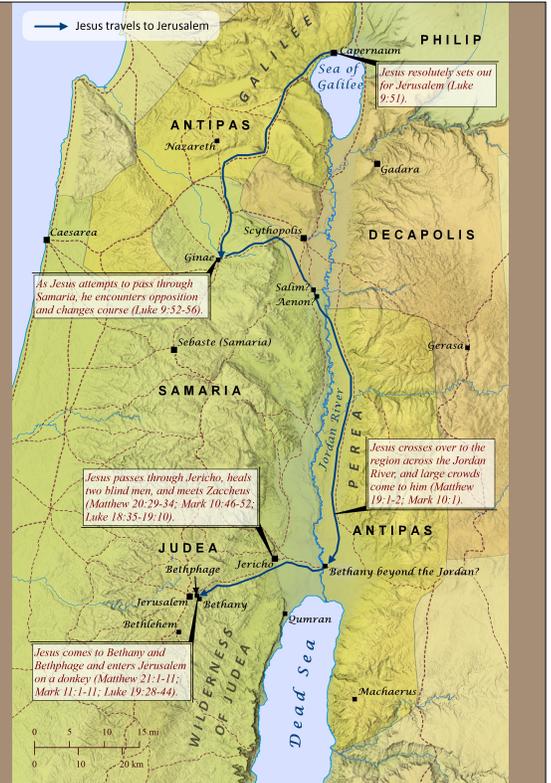
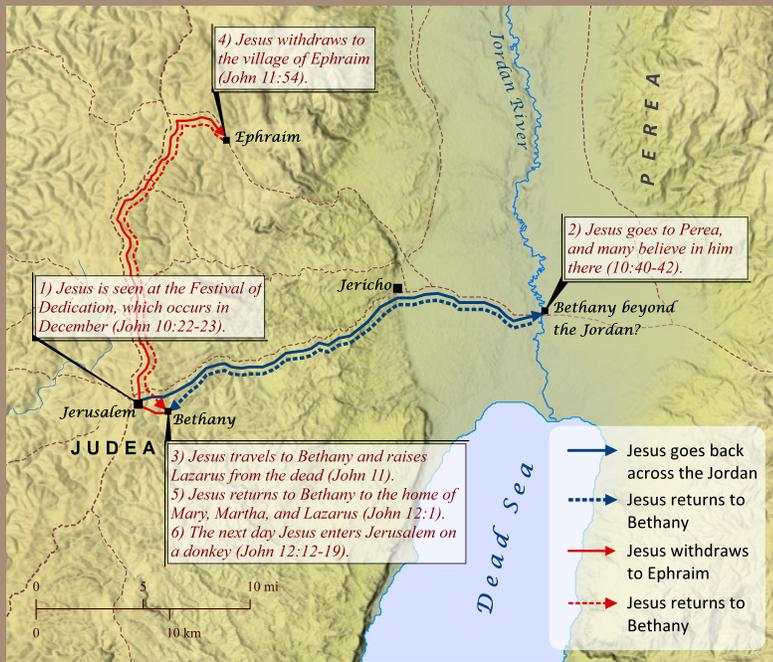




The Journey to Jerusalem

- Jesus departed from Galilee, setting his face towards Jerusalem knowing he would be crucified there.
 - Matthew, Mark, and Luke emphasize the final, dramatic, and purposeful journey toward the cross.
 - John records at least three, perhaps more, trips to Jerusalem for various festivals, including the Passover, the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles), and the Feast of Dedication.
 - The differences between the Synoptics' and John's accounts are noteworthy, but they are not irreconcilable. The Synoptics, after noting that Jesus began his trip at Capernaum, likely condensed their accounts (as occurs elsewhere in the Gospels) to omit Jesus' initial arrival in Jerusalem and appearance at the Festival of Dedication, thus picking up with Jesus in Perea (stage 2 of John's itinerary). Then all the Gospels recount Jesus' trip (back) to Bethany and Jerusalem, passing through Jericho along the way. Likewise, the Synoptics must have simply omitted the few months Jesus spent in Ephraim to escape the Jewish leaders (stage 4 of John's itinerary) and rejoined John's account where Jesus is preparing to enter Jerusalem on a donkey.



Jesus' Jubilee Announcement in Luke 4

At the end of the Old Testament story, we are left waiting for this anointed one to rescue Israel. When Jesus comes on the scene, he makes it abundantly clear he is the long-awaited Messiah. Take a look at Jesus' epic announcement at the start of the book of Luke.

*And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through all the surrounding district. And he began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and as was his custom, he entered the synagogue **on the Sabbath**, and stood up to read.*

And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. And he opened the book and found the place where it was written,

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,

Because he anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor.

*He has sent me to proclaim **release** to the captives,*

And recovery of sight to the blind,

*To **set free** those who are oppressed,*

*To proclaim **the year of the LORD'S favor.**"*

And he closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Luke 4:14-21

Sound familiar? Jesus is the anointed one from Isaiah 61. Let's compare the subtle differences between Isaiah's original words and Jesus' reading of them.

*"The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,
Because he has anointed me
To bring good news to the poor;
He has sent me **to bind up the brokenhearted**,
To proclaim liberty to captives
And recovery of sight for the blind

To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD
And the day of vengeance of our God."*

Isaiah 61:1-2

*"The Spirit of the LORD is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me
to proclaim **release** for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favor."*

Luke 4:18-19

Key Definitions

There are two words in this passage that bring clarity to Jesus' mission. Let's look at these key definitions.

Freedom (Grk. *aphesis* "release," Heb. *deror* "Jubilee liberation," see Isa. 61:1 and Lev. 25:10): This is the common word for "forgiveness" in Luke (1:77 or 3:3), but the word's meaning is broader: release from burden or bondage. The word in Isaiah 61 is rooted in the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25) and is about release from the social consequences of a society's collective sin: freedom from debt, slavery, poverty, and oppression.

The poor (Grk. *ptokhos*, Heb. *aniy*): refers to more than economic status. It's about a person's wider social location in terms of family heritage, land ownership, vocation, gender, ethnicity, education, and religious purity. In Jewish literature, it refers to anyone of low status, or who lives outside the socially accepted boundary lines.

Jesus' mission is directed to the poor ... in the holistic sense of those who are for any number of reasons relegated to positions outside the boundaries of God's people. Jesus refuses to recognize those socially determined boundaries, asserting instead that these "outsiders" now can belong to God's family.

Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 211

What Was the Meaning of Jesus' Claim?

Scholar Christopher Bruno summarizes this point well when he states,

Jesus' claim to "fulfill" Isaiah 61 must be seen as a claim to inaugurate the climactic Jubilee of God's people, the time when their freedom from captivity and oppression would be permanent. The main feature of Jesus' fulfillment of the Jubilee in Luke 4 is the proclamation of *αφεσις*, which in Luke-Acts refers ... to forgiven sin and ... to release from physical/economic oppression. This pattern is also evident in the church's pattern of sharing physical goods in Acts (see Acts 2:44-45; 4:32), which is ... preceded by Peter's admonition to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (*αφεσιν των αμαρτιων*; Acts 2:38).

Christopher Bruno, "*Jesus is Our Jubilee... But How?*" *The Old Testament Background and Lukan Fulfillment of the Ethics of Jubilee* 88

The Starting Point of Jesus' Ministry

The Nazareth announcement in Luke 4 sets the agenda for Jesus' healing and teaching ministry. The story continues in Luke 5-9, where he reaches out to everyone he said he would.

- A leper (5:12-16).
- A paralyzed man (5:17-27). Note the use of *aphesis* to mean **forgiveness** of sin and **release** from sickness with multiple nuances in this story.
- A man with a deformed hand **on the Sabbath** (6:6-11). Jesus "saves life" on the Sabbath.
- The reviving of the Roman centurion's servant (7:1-10).
- The grieving widow and mother in Nain (7:11-16). "God has come to visit his people."
- The blind, leprosy, lame, deaf, and poor are healed (7:22).
- A repentant prostitute (7:36-49). Note the repetition of *aphesis*, **forgiveness**, and **release** in the parable.
- Exorcisms for the demon-tormented (11:14-23).
- The hunch-backed woman (13:10-17). Note the explicit mention of **slavery**, **release**, and **freedom** vocabulary in Jesus' view of her illness.

Sabbath Controversies in Matthew 11-12

The Gospel of Matthew connects Jesus as the one ushering in Sabbath rest. However, Jesus' understanding of Sabbath is a cause for controversy with Israel's leaders.

This section of Matthew begins with Jesus' famous words on rest.

*At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in your sight. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal him. Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and **I will give you rest**. 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**. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

Matthew 11:25-30

Samuele Bacchiocchi notices several profound claims in Jesus' words here ("Matthew 11:28-30: Jesus' Rest and the Sabbath," 300-303).

- **Jesus is demonstrating his messiahship.** Matthew's placing the saying about the rest offered by Jesus right after Jesus' messianic disclosure was presumably intended to substantiate the latter through the former. In other words, through the structural arrangement of the narrative, Matthew seems to be saying that Jesus not only revealed (vv. 25-26) and proclaimed (v. 27) his messiahship, but also demonstrated it by offering the messianic rest typified by the Sabbath.
- **Devotion to the law should set you free.** The metaphor of the yoke was commonly used to express subordination and loyalty to God, especially through obedience to his law. Thus Jeremiah speaks of the leaders of the people who knew "the law of their God, but they all alike had broken the yoke, they had burst the bonds" (5:5; cf. 2:20). In the following chapter, the same prophet says to the people: "Find rest for your souls" by learning anew obedience to God's law (6:6; cf. Num. 25:3). Rabbis often spoke of "the yoke of the Torah," "the yoke of the kingdom of heaven," "the yoke of the commandments," "the yoke of God." Rabbi Nehunya b. Kanah (ca. 70) is reported to have said, "He that takes upon himself the yoke of the Law, from him shall be taken away the yoke of the kingdom and the yoke of worldly care" (Pirke Aboth 3:5). What this means is that devotion to the law and its interpretation is supposed to free a person from the troubles and cares of this world.
- **Following the law means following a person.** Matthew sets forth the "yoke" of Jesus, not as commitment to a new Torah, but as dedication to a person who is the true interpreter and fulfiller of the Law and the Prophets. The emphasis on the person is self-evident in the saying of Jesus, "Come to me ... take my yoke ... learn from me ... I will give you rest." Moreover, the parallel structure of verses 28 and 29 indicates that taking the yoke of Jesus is equivalent to coming to and learning from him. That is to say, it is to personally accept Jesus as Messiah. Such an acceptance is an "easy" and "light" yoke, not because Jesus weakens the demands of the law (cf. Matt 5:20) but because, as T. W. Manson puts it, "Jesus claims to do for men what the Law claimed to do; but in a different way." The difference lies in Christ's claim to offer to his disciples the rest of messianic redemption to which the law, and more specifically, the Sabbath, had always pointed.

Following this teaching, Matthew inserts two stories of Sabbath controversies between Jesus and Israel's religious leaders.

*At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on **the Sabbath**, and his disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look, your disciples do what is not lawful to do **on a Sabbath**." But he said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? Or have you not read in the Law, that **on the Sabbath** the priests in the temple break the **Sabbath** and are innocent? But I say to you that one greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of **Man is Lord of the Sabbath**."*

*Departing from there, he went into their synagogue. And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, "Is it lawful to heal on the **Sabbath**?"—so that they might accuse him. And he said to them, "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it **is lawful to do good on the Sabbath**." Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!" He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other.*

Matthew 12:1-13

Notice that Jesus is not doing away with the concept of Sabbath. The controversy centers not on whether the Sabbath should be observed (there is no suggestion that Jesus questioned that) but on what that observance entailed in practical terms. Theologian R.T. France sheds light on the popular interpretation on how to practically observe the Sabbath:

Fundamental to the rabbinic discussion was the agreed list (m.Šabb. 7:2) of 39 categories of activity which were to be classified as "work" for this purpose, some of which are very specific ("writing two letters, erasing in order to write two letters") others so broad as to need considerable further specification ("building, pulling down"), while the last ("taking anything from one 'domain' [normally a private courtyard] to another") is so open-ended as to cover a vast range of daily activities. The 39 categories of work do not explicitly include traveling, but this too was regarded as "work," a "Sabbath day's journey" being limited to 2,000 cubits, a little over half a mile. These two rules together made Sabbath life potentially so inconvenient that the Pharisees developed an elaborate system of "boundary-extensions" ('erubin) to allow more freedom of movement without violating the basic rules. The 'erub system illustrates an essential element of all this scribal development of Sabbath law: its aim was not simply to make life difficult (though it must often have seemed like that), but to work out a way in which people could cope with the practicalities of life within the limits of their very rigorous understanding of "work." The elaboration of details is intended to leave nothing to chance, so that no one can inadvertently come anywhere near violating the law itself. Some rabbis spoke about this as "putting up a fence around the law."

R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 455-456

That's a lot of specifics! If you've been paying attention to the story so far, it's probably clear that Israel's religious leaders missed the point of the Sabbath. Jesus showed that the Sabbath was supposed to be about mercy, not legalism. It was supposed to point to him, the one promised through all of Israel's prophets, the one who would restore the rhythm of creation.

The Organization of John's Gospel

John picks up the pattern of seven in his Gospel account. He has designed the first and last movements of his account to fall into two matching weeks of seven days each. These are the only clusters of chronological notices in the entire book. See the chart below, adapted from Richard Bauckham, "Dimensions of Meaning in the Gospel of John's First Week," 134-35.

	The first week of Jesus' first sign	The last week of Jesus' seventh and final sign
Day 1	1:19-28 <i>"In Bethany beyond the Jordan"</i> (1:28) John's testimony to leaders from Jerusalem Jesus anointed by the Spirit (1:32-33). See day seven of the last week in 20:21-22.	12:1-11 <i>"Six days before Passover, Jesus came to Bethany"</i> (12:1) Jesus anointed by Mary at Bethany
Day 2	1:29-34 <i>"the next day"</i> (1:29) John's testimony about Jesus	12:12-36 <i>"the next day"</i> (12:12) Jesus rides into Jerusalem as Israel's king
Day 3	1:35-39 <i>"the next day"</i> (1:35) Andrew and anonymous disciple follow Jesus <i>"They stayed with him that day. It was about the 10th hour"</i> (1:39)	12:36 <i>"Jesus was hiding from them"</i>
Day 4	1:40-42 Andrew brings Simon to meet Jesus	12:36 <i>"Jesus was hiding from them"</i>
Day 5	1:43-51 <i>"the next day"</i> (1:43) Jesus meets Nathanael and leaves for Galilee	13:1-19:42 <i>"it was the day of preparation (for Passover, 19:31, 42)"</i> Jesus final words and footwashing Jesus' arrest and two trials Crucifixion and burial
	1:49 <i>"you are the king of Israel"</i>	19:19 Jesus titled "king of the Jews"
	1:29-36 John the Baptist's witness <i>"the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"</i> (1:29, 36) <i>"I have seen and bear witness, this is the Son of God"</i> (1:34)	19:34-35 The Beloved disciple's witness <i>"and the soldier pierced his side and there flowed water and blood, and the one who saw has borne witness, and his witness is true, and he knows his testimony is true"</i> (19:34-35)
	1:51 Jesus' first Son of Man saying <i>"angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man"</i> (1:51) <i>"Son of Man lifted up"</i>	13:31 Jesus' final Son of Man saying <i>"now is the Son of Man glorified"</i> (13:31) Jesus is lifted up onto the cross
Day 6	2:1 Traveling to Cana	13:1; 19:31, 42 Passover/Sabbath

Day 7	2:1-11 "on the third day" (2:1 in relation to 1:43) Jesus' first sign-act at the wedding in Cana	20:1-23 "On the first day of the week" (20:1, the "third day" after Jesus' death) Jesus seventh sign-act of resurrection
	2:4 "my hour has not yet come"	17:1 "the hour has come"
	2:11 Jesus provides super-abundant wine from the water	11:24-25, 20:21-22 Jesus provides eternal life (11:24-25) Jesus pours out the Spirit on the disciples (20:21-22) See Day 1, 1:32-33.

The pattern of seven also informs the middle of John's Gospel account, chapters 2-12. It contains two large blocks of stories. Jesus encounters four classic Jewish institutions (2-4) and then four Jewish feasts (5-10), showing how he is the fulfillment or true reality to which all these point. John includes seven signs in total, clearly following his aim to prove the significance of Jesus. Take a look at the chart.

The Seven Signs in John

Seven Signs	Called a "sign" (Grk. σημειον)	Details that emphasize the sign's meaning
2:1-11 Water turned into wine	2:11 "the beginning of his signs "	Water held in six purification jars holding 20-30 gallons each (2:6), an overabundant amount and for ritual purification
4:46-54 Healing of the official's son	4:54 "the second sign "	Son recovered at the point of death (4:47) at the very "hour" Jesus spoke (4:52-53)
5:2-9 Healing the crippled man on the Sabbath	6:2 "the signs he was performing on the sick"	Paralyzed for 38 years (see Deut. 2:14 for the only other "38" in the Bible); The Father and Jesus are doing work on the Sabbath (5:17)
6:1-15 Feeding the 5,000	6:14 "the people saw the sign he had done"	I am the bread of life (6:35) I am the bread that comes down from heaven (6:41)
9:1-2 Healing the blind man on the Sabbath	9:16 "How could this man do such signs ?"	I am the light of the world (8:12; 9:5) I have come so that those who do not see might see (9:39)
11:1-45 Raising Lazarus from the dead	12:18 "the people heard that Jesus did this sign "	I am the resurrection and the life (11:25)
19:1-46 The death of Jesus	2:18-19 "The Jews said, 'What sign will you do to show your authority ...?' Jesus answered, 'Destroy	
20:1-31 The resurrection of Jesus	this temple and in three days I will raise it up."	

There are other miraculous events not called signs, such as Jesus walking on water (6:1-15) and the large catch of fish (21:4-11). The design of the book of John accomplishes the aim stated at the end of the book.

*Therefore **many other signs** Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name.*

John 20:30-31

Paul's Thoughts on Sabbath

If we needed to summarize Jesus' message in one sentence, we could say, "The Kingdom of God is here." The arrival of the Kingdom of God through Christ also meant the arrival of the ultimate seventh-day rest. But it doesn't appear that Paul was going around enforcing the Sabbath—one of the most tangible ways at the time to celebrate this reality. Why not?

We need to remember, most of Paul's letters are responses to problems and issues within churches. Many early Christians did not come from a Jewish background, in which case Paul was not strict about the observance of the Sabbath. However, some Christians from Jewish backgrounds were trying to make the former markers of the Jewish faith—Sabbath, circumcision, and kosher food laws—a barrier of entry to follow Jesus. Paul consistently rebukes these people.

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

Colossians 2:16-17

Paul did not argue against the importance of the laws of Torah. However, he stressed that they culminate in Jesus. If observing the Sabbath on a specific day of the week enabled you to honor Jesus, Paul would say go for it! Rituals do shape us; however, they lose their point when they no longer connect us to the person of Jesus.

It would also seem the forms and practices to which we follow Jesus may shift depending on generation and culture (see Peter's vision, removal of kosher food laws in Acts 10). The attempt to trap how you celebrate the practice of new creation into one cultural form will not work. There can be many ways cultures, families, and individual can make rituals to shape their relationship with Christ and one another. The challenging question then becomes: at what point are we making what the Spirit has led our community to do the bar for all other communities? Paul would warn us against this type of thinking.

Entering into Sabbath Rest in Hebrews 3-4

Perhaps one of the most famous passages on rest in the New Testament occurs in the book of Hebrews. The author remains anonymous; however, it is clear that it is a pastor writing to a congregation of Greek-speaking Jews. He is trying to compel them not to abandon their faith in Jesus in light of persecution. His letter is one huge rhetorical hammer that elevates Jesus above all things a Jewish person would care about—spiritual beings, Moses, Joshua, the priesthood, and the tabernacle.

In chapter 3-4, the author focuses in on rest. Let's take a look.

Now Moses was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; but Christ was faithful as a Son over his house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says,

*“Today if you hear his voice,
Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked me,
As in the day of trial in the wilderness,
Where your fathers tried me by testing me,
And saw my works for forty years.
“Therefore I was angry with this generation,
And said, ‘They always go astray in their heart,
And they did not know my ways’;
As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter **my rest.**’”*

Hebrews 3:5-11

The author is referring to Israel's rebellion in the wilderness as they traveled to enter the promised land. The land itself serves as an image of hope for the restored seventh-day rest. These stories are documented in the book of Numbers (where there are seven stories of rebellion). However, the author does not include pieces of those narratives. Rather, he uses Psalm 95 compiled in light of the exile. Why?

It would appear the author selected Psalm 95 because it activates the two stories of rebellion when entering the promised land. First, Israel's rebellion in the wilderness after the exodus and Israel's rebellion once in the land which led to exile. These past narratives are an image to the future hope that Jesus has ushered into the present. The author goes on to make his point in the following verses.

Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, while it is said,

"Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked me."

For who provoked him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering his rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

For we who have believed enter that rest, just as he has said, "As I swore in my anger, They shall not enter my rest," although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works"; and again in this passage, "They shall not enter my rest."

Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, he again fixes a certain day, "today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

For if Joshua 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, so that no one will fall through following the same example of disobedience.

Hebrews 3:5-4:11

The author affirms the present challenge to enter into rest as well as a future hope for ultimate rest. He makes it abundantly clear that it's not about going back to the land or settling in some physical location. Rest comes to those who have trust in Jesus. It's a present and future reality to which he affirms near the end of his exhortation.

*But you **have come to Mount Zion** and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

Hebrews 12:22-24

He believes in this present age, we have come in contact with new creation—seventh-day rest—which is here called Mount Zion.