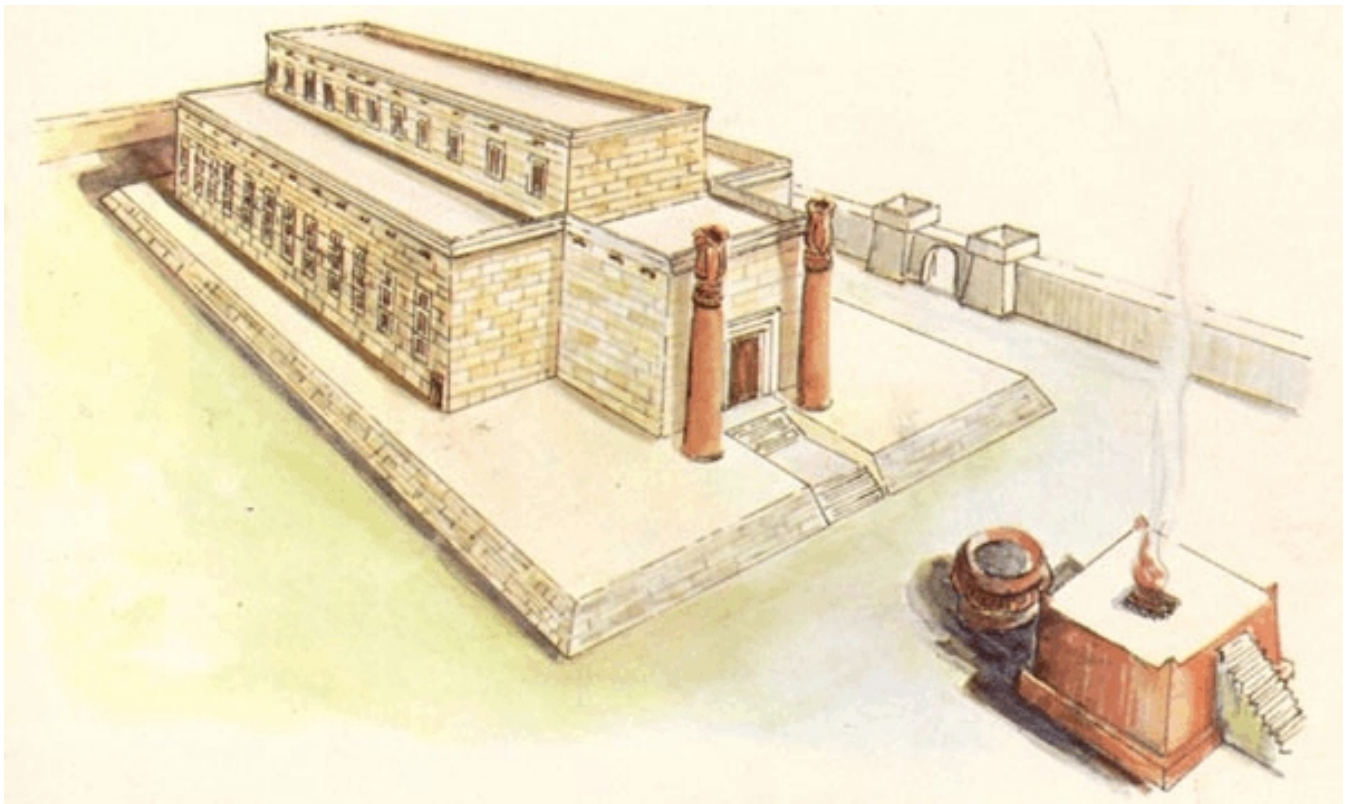

The Superiority of Christ and His Covenant



A Study of the Book of Hebrews

Gene Taylor

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An Introduction to the Book of Hebrews

I. Authorship

- A. The authorship of the book of Hebrews is, at best, uncertain.
- B. Many different authors have been suggested.
 - 1. Luke. He was a Gentile while the author was most definitely a Hebrew.
 - 2. Barnabas.
 - a. He was a Levite who had been born in Cyprus but lived in Jerusalem and would have been familiar with the Jewish religion and lifestyle.
 - b. In reality, there is no evidence to support his authorship of the book.
 - 3. Apollos.
 - a. Some suggest that because of his eloquence and having been taught by Aquila and Priscilla, he could have written this epistle.
 - b. He was an Alexandrian Jew and the epistle requires a Jew who had intimate knowledge of Jerusalem, the Temple and the Jewish Christians there.
 - 4. Others suggested include Clement of Rome, Silvanus, Philip, Priscilla, and Paul.
- C. Evidence for Pauline authorship.
 - 1. Many of the early writers of church history, some almost dating back to the first century, attribute the letter to Paul.
 - 2. Some internal evidence.
 - a. The author was in prison (10:34). Paul had been imprisoned many times. (2 Cor. 11:23)
 - b. Habakkuk's declaration that the just shall live by faith is quoted only three times in the New Testament—twice in Paul's epistles and once in this epistle. (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38)
 - c. The close companionship of Timothy. (13:23)
 - d. A deep spiritual concern for Israel. (Rom. 9:1-5; 10:1-4)
 - e. The literary style, though somewhat different from Paul's epistles, does bear resemblance to his in several points:
 - 1) The preeminence of Christ. (1:1-3; Col. 1:14-19)
 - 2) The authentication of apostles by divine gifts and miracles. (2:3-4; 1 Cor. 12-14; 2 Cor. 12:12)
 - 3) The humiliation of Christ. (2:9-18; Phil. 2:5-11)
 - 4) The use of Israel's wanderings as examples to Christians. (3:7 - 4:8; 1 Cor. 10:1-11)
 - 5) The temporary nature of the Old Covenant. (8:1-13; 2 Cor. 3:6-18)
 - 6) The emphasis on faith. (11:1-40; Rom. 1:17)
 - 3. Who would be more qualified to write such an epistle than Paul?
 - a. A former "Hebrew of the Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5) who had advanced beyond his contemporaries (Gal. 1:14), who became a fully recognized apostle of Christ (2 Cor. 12:11).
 - b. His training at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) provided him with a thorough knowledge of Judaism and the Temple.
 - c. He was always concerned with the spiritual status of the Jews—going to them first whenever he went to a new city.

D. In the end, though, we cannot be dogmatic. We must agree with Origen who said, “Who wrote the Epistle God only knows certainly.”

II. Recipients

- A. The epistle is to Christians. They are referred to as:
1. “Brethren.” (3:1, 12)
 2. “Beloved.” (6:9)
 3. “Partakers of the heavenly calling.” (3:1)
 4. “Partakers of Christ.” (3:14)
- B. The letter is written to Jewish Christians who were being tempted to turn from Christ and go back to their former religion under the Old Law.
1. They had endured persecutions, identified themselves with other oppressed Christians, had seen their material possessions destroyed, and had compassion over the writer’s imprisonment. (10:32-34)
 2. But they had grown tired of their persecutions and had failed to trust God as they once had. (10:35-38)
 3. As former Jews:
 - a. They had a proud heritage—the chosen people of God, the descendants of Abraham.
 - b. It was difficult to realize that the Old Law was no longer in force.
 - c. They had difficulty accepting that the Gentiles were now acceptable before God without submission to Judaism.
 4. There is no reference to Gentiles or issues normally connected to the Gentiles in the book.
- C. Though they had been saved for some time, as children of God they were immature because they had failed to grow spiritually. (5:11-14)
- D. Apparently they were well-known to the author and he to them.
1. He planned to visit them upon his release from prison. (13:23)
 2. The fact that he wanted to be “restored” to them (13:23), at least hints that he had formerly been with them.
- E. Most scholars suggest they lived in either Rome or Palestine.
1. Rome.
 - a. Greetings is sent from believers in Italy (13:24) but it is not clear whether that means they are in Italy or sending greetings from outside Italy to their friends and brothers back there.
 - b. Those who support a Rome destination show that the recipients of the epistle were known for their financial generosity (6:10) while the church in Jerusalem was noted for its poverty. (Acts 11:27-30; Rom. 15:26)
 2. Jerusalem.
 - a. The warnings in the book, so say the ones who believe the recipients lived in Jerusalem, point to the destruction and persecution that would come upon that city when the Temple was destroyed.
 - b. Those in Jerusalem, they say, would have the greatest temptation to return to Judaism.
 3. As with authorship, no one can be sure where the recipients lived.

III. Date of Writing

- A. Most scholars date the book somewhere around 66-68 A.D. just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.
 - 1. Timothy was still alive. (13:23)
 - 2. The recipients were to patiently endure the persecutions anticipated by the destruction of Jerusalem. (10:22-25)
 - 3. The recipients seemed to be “second generation” Christians who had been disciples for a long time. (5:12)
- B. It would seem the real focus of the book would be lost if Jerusalem and the Temple were already destroyed.

IV. Theme and Purpose

- A. The theme of the epistle is to show the superiority of Jesus and His way of faith to the Old Law and its system of religion.
 - 1. The keyword in the epistle is “better.”
 - a. It is used 13 times in the book. (1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6 [twice]; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24)
 - b. Everything connected with Christ is better than anything that preceded Him.
 - 2. Because of this theme, the book serves as a summary of the transition between the Old Testament and the New.
 - a. There is no greater contrast to be found anywhere in Scripture between the Old Testament and New that is more vivid and striking than in this epistle.
 - b. Christ’s superiority to the Jewish system is the basis for the encouragement given to the recipients to press forward and not go back.
- B. The setting forth of this theme was meant to:
 - 1. Keep the recipients from going back to Judaism. (2:1-4; 10:19-25)
 - 2. Provoke them to grow as Christians. (5:11-14; 10:32-39)
 - 3. Comfort them in their persecutions. (11:1 - 12:13)
 - 4. Enlighten them about the chastening of the Lord. (6:3-12; 10:26-31; 12:3-13)
 - 5. Alert them to the dangers of false teaching. (13:9)
 - 6. Request prayer for the author. (13:18-25)

V. Some Distinctive Features

- A. The book, more clearly than any other, presents the priesthood of Jesus.
- B. The chastening of the Lord is explained. (12:3-12)
- C. “Faith’s Hall of Fame” is presented. (11:1-40)
- D. The book is filled with warnings signaled by the word “lest.” (2:1; 3:12, 13; 4:11; 12:3, 13, 15)
- E. The author involves himself in the commands to his readers by use of the phrase “let us.” (4:1, 11, 14, 16; 6:1; 10:22, 23, 24; 12:1, 28; 13:13, 15)

(Source for much of this material is New Testament Survey, Robert G. Gromacki, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974, pp. 319-334)

An Outline of the Book of Hebrews

I. The Superiority of Christ to the Prophets (1:1-3)

- A. Jesus is the complete and final revelation of God. (1, 2a)
- B. Jesus is the Son of God. (2b, 3)
 - 1. Heir of all things.
 - 2. Made the worlds.
 - 3. The brightness of God's glory.
 - 4. The express image of God's person.
 - 5. Upholds all things by the word of His power.
 - 6. Purged the sins of man.
 - 7. Sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

II. The Superiority of Christ to Angels (1:4 - 2:18)

- A. In name: "My Son." (1:4-5)
- B. In worship: "Worship Him." (1:6-7)
- C. In universal rule. (1:8 - 2:4)
 - 1. Because of character and creation. (1:8-12)
 - 2. Served by angels. (1:13-14)
 - 3. Hence, the certainty of punishment to those who neglected God's revelation through His Son. (2:1-4)
- D. In that the world to come is subject to Him because by becoming lower than the angels He proved worthy to have all things in subjection to Him. (2:15-18)
 - 1. Partook of flesh and blood, destroyed the devil who had power over death and was crowned with glory and honor.
 - 2. Gives aid to the seed of Abraham not to angels.
 - 3. Made a propitiation for the sins of man.
 - 4. Having been tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted now.

III. The Superiority of Christ to Moses (3:1-19)

- A. In respect to greatness and glory. (1-6)
- B. Warnings against the unbelief which characterized those who followed Moses. (7-19)

IV. The Superiority of the Rest Given by Christ to That Given by Joshua (4:1-13)

- A. The danger of losing the heavenly rest through unbelief and rebellion. (1-3)
- B. The heavenly rest in type. (4-10)
 - 1. The seventh day. (4-5)
 - 2. Canaan. (6-8)
 - 3. The heavenly rest. (9-10)
- C. Exhortations and warnings concerning the heavenly rest. (11-13)
 - 1. Be diligent.
 - 2. Do not be disobedient for:
 - a. The word of God is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.
 - b. Nothing is hidden from God.

V. The Superiority of Christ as High Priest (4:14 - 7:28)

- A. The purpose of His priesthood and His fitness for it. (4:14 - 5:10)
 - 1. The fact of His priesthood. (4:14-16)
 - 2. The office of the priesthood. (5:1-4)
 - 3. Christ's qualifications for the priesthood. (5:5-10)
- B. The necessity of growth in knowledge in order to realize the hope of the priesthood. (5:11 - 6:20)
 - 1. The difficulty of explaining the priesthood to the recipients of the epistle because of their limited knowledge and lack of growth. (5:11-14)
 - 2. The exhortation to go on to perfection and the awful consequences of falling away. (6:1-8)
 - 3. Encouragement to faithfulness. (6:9-20)
 - a. The writer's hope for them. (9-12)
 - b. The example of Abraham. (13-20)
- C. Proofs of the superiority of Christ's priesthood. (7:1-28)
 - 1. He is a priest after a higher order than Aaron's. (1-19) As seen in:
 - a. Melchizedek as a type. (1-3)
 - b. Melchizedek's greatness in relation to Abraham. (4-10)
 - c. The imperfection of the Levitical priesthood. (11-19)
 - 2. He is a priest made with an oath. (20-22)
 - 3. He is an unchangeable priest. (23-25)
 - 4. He is a sinless priest. (26-28)
- D. Christ is a priest of a better covenant. (8:1-13)
 - 1. He serves in the true tabernacle of which the earthly was a type. (1-5)
 - 2. He is the Mediator of a new covenant. (6-13)
- E. Christ is a priest in a better tabernacle. (9:1-28)
 - 1. The old tabernacle and its imperfect services. (1-10)
 - 2. The superiority of Christ's ministry in the heaven tabernacle. (11-14)
 - 3. The effectiveness of the new covenant based upon the death of Christ. (15-22)
 - 4. The necessity and adequacy of the better sacrifice. (23-28)
- F. Christ is a priest of a better sacrifice. (10:1-39)
 - 1. The impossibility of the sacrifices of the law of Moses to take away sin. (1-4)
 - 2. The effective and final sacrifice of Christ. (5-14)
 - 3. The finality of Christ's sacrifice confirmed by prophecy. (15-18)
 - 4. An exhortation based on the Priesthood of Jesus Christ. (19-39)
 - a. To draw near to God. (22)
 - b. To hold fast the confession of hope. (23)
 - c. To consider one another to provoke to love and good works. (24)
 - d. To not forsake the assembling with other Christians. (25)
 - e. To not sin willfully. (26)
 - f. To not trample the Son of God underfoot. (29)
 - g. To not cast away the confidence given by Christ. (35)
 - h. To endure to the end. (36)

VI. The Nature, Importance and Duties of Faith (11:1 - 13:25)

- A. The nature of faith. (11:1-3)
 - 1. Faith defined. (1)
 - 2. Faith illustrated. (2, 3)

- B. The importance of faith as seen in the lives of the worthies of old. (11:4-40)
 - 1. Illustrations from the antedeluvian period. (4-7)
 - 2. Illustrations from the patriarchs: faith in God and His promises. (8-29)
 - 3. Illustrations from the Mosaic era: faith in God's promises of the coming Messiah. (30-40)
- C. The challenge to live by faith. (12:1-29)
 - 1. Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, is our example of faithful endurance. (1-4)
 - 2. The chastening of the Lord is not designed to challenge faith but to strengthen it. (5-11)
 - 3. The danger of falling short of the grace of God. (12-17)
 - 4. The nature of the old covenant in contrast to that of the new. (18-24)
 - 5. Do not refuse to hear and obey God. (25-29)
 - a. He will "shake" the heavens and earth and they, along with those in them, will be destroyed.
 - b. The kingdom of Christ cannot be shaken and those who are in it by their obedient faith will not be destroyed.
- D. Final exhortation regarding responsibilities in response to Christ and His way. (13:1-25)
 - 1. Social responsibilities. (1-7)
 - a. Brotherly love. (1)
 - b. Hospitality. (2)
 - c. Remembrance of those persecuted for righteousness' sake. (3)
 - d. Marriage. (4)
 - e. Contentment in the Lord versus covetousness. (5-6)
 - f. Respect for elders. (7)
 - 2. Purity of doctrine and loyalty to Christ. (8-16)
 - a. Do not be carried away by strange doctrines. (8)
 - b. Those sanctified by the sacrifice of Christ should worship and praise Him, do good to and share with others. (9-16)
 - 3. Obedience to elders. (17)
 - 4. A request for prayers. (18-19)
 - 5. Benediction and farewell. (20-25)

Lesson One: The Superiority of Christ as a Messenger - His Superiority to Prophets and Angels

Text: Hebrews 1:1 - 2:18

1. Through whom did God speak to man in times past? Through whom does He now speak?
2. What is meant by the term “last days?” (1:2)
3. Name the things that are said of the Son in verses two and three of chapter one and briefly tell what each means.
4. List the reasons given in chapter one as to why the Son is said to be superior to angels.
5. What does “firstborn” mean?
6. What does a scepter represent?
7. What is meant by the phrase “sit at my right hand?” (1:13)
8. What is the role of angels as “ministering spirits?”
9. Why must Christians “give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard?” (2:1)
10. How did the “word spoken through angels prove steadfast?” What happened to those who were disobedient to it?
11. What is the consequence of disobeying the word spoken through the Son?
12. How was the word of the Son confirmed?
13. If the Son was made “a little lower than the angels,” then how is He superior to them?
14. How was the Son “made perfect through sufferings?”
15. What does “sanctify” mean? How are “He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified” one?
16. Why is the Son not ashamed to call Christians “brethren?”
17. Why did the Son partake of flesh and blood?
18. Who had the power of death? How did the Son destroy him?
19. Who, before the freedom granted by the Son, were subject to bondage? Why?
20. What does “propitiation” mean? How does it apply to the Son?

Lesson Two: The Superiority of Christ as a Leader - His Superiority to Moses and Joshua

Text: Hebrews 3:1 - 4:13

1. How can Jesus be referred to as “the Apostle...of our confession?”
2. How is Jesus worthy of more glory than Moses?
3. What was the role of Moses in the house of God? The role of Jesus? Compare and contrast their respective roles.
4. Who is the house of God today? What must one do to remain in that house?
5. What caused God to be angry with the children of Israel while they were in the wilderness? What application does that have today?
6. What is a hardened heart?
7. What is the “deceitfulness of sin?”
8. What were the consequences of the unbelief of the Israelites in the wilderness?
9. What “promise...rest” remains for the children of God? How can one “come short of it?”
10. How, as stated in 4:2, was the “gospel” preached to Israel in the wilderness? How did they fail to profit by that word?
11. What connection is there between the rest that remains for the children of God and God’s rest on the seventh day of creation?
12. Can you explain why in reference to Psalm 95 in 3:7 it says, “the Holy Spirit says” and in 4:7, quoting the same passage, that David is cited as the one having spoken it?
13. When is a child of God to cease from the works he does for the Lord? Why?
14. What, according to 4:11, is necessary to enter the heavenly rest?
15. How is the word of God:
 - a. Living?
 - b. Powerful (active)?
 - c. Sharper than any two-edged sword?
 - d. A discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart?
16. What is hidden from God? What are the consequences of this?

Lesson Three: The Superiority of Christ as a Priest - His Superiority to the Levites

Text: Hebrews 4:14 - 7:28

1. What does it mean when it says, “we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens?”
2. Why was it important for Jesus to be tempted “in all points as we are?”
3. What does it mean to “come boldly to the throne of grace?”
4. What is the main responsibility of the high priest?
5. What qualified Jesus to serve as high priest?
6. What does it mean to be “dull of hearing?”
7. What had the writer of this letter expected of its recipients as to their level of knowledge? Why? What did he find it to be instead?
8. What is meant by “perfection?” (6:1) How can one “go on to” it?
9. If one fails to press on to perfection, what are the consequences? Why?
10. Why is it “impossible” to renew those who have fallen away?
11. How can one “crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame?”
12. What are the “things that accompany salvation?”
13. What is the example of Abraham in reference to patient endurance?
14. Why is it impossible for God to lie? Of what consequence is that to the Christian?
15. Who was Melchizedek? What bearing does he have on Jesus?
16. How is the priestly order of Melchizedek shown to be superior to the Levitical order?
17. What imperfection was there to the Levitical priesthood?
18. Why did there have to be a change of law?
19. What principle of Biblical interpretation does 7:14 teach? What applications can be made of that principle today?
20. List those things mentioned in verses 20 through 28 which illustrate the superiority of Christ’s priesthood to that of the Levites.

Lesson Four: The Superiority of Christ's Covenant to the Old

Text: Hebrews 8:1 - 9:28

1. What does the writer say is the main point (KJV: "sum") of what he has written? What makes it so important?
2. What is meant by "sanctuary?" Where is it located?
3. What is the "true tabernacle?"
4. Why could Jesus not serve as a priest on earth?
5. Define the following terms.
 - a. Copy (KJV: "example.")
 - b. Shadow.
 - c. Pattern.
6. How do the terms in question five apply to the Old Testament tabernacle?
7. How was Moses instructed to build the tabernacle? How would he accomplish that goal?
8. In comparison to that of the law of Moses, what kind of ministry does Jesus have? Why?
9. In what way did the first covenant have faults?
10. How, according to 8:8-12 which is a quotation from Jeremiah 31:31-34, does the new covenant differ from the old?
11. How did the new covenant make the first one old? What does the writer say was happening to the first covenant? What does that mean?
12. What made up the old tabernacle?
13. Who entered the "first (part of the old) tabernacle?" For what purpose?
14. Who entered the "second" (part of the old tabernacle)? How often? For what purpose?
15. For what, according to 9:9-10, was the old law, its tabernacle and services symbolic?
16. What was the "time of reformation?" (9:10)
17. What made the tabernacle brought by Christ greater than the one of the old covenant?
18. What allowed Christ to enter the Most Holy Place? For what purpose did He enter?
19. What does the blood of Christ accomplish for man?
20. What is necessary for a testament, or will, to be valid? How does that apply to Jesus and the New Testament?
21. Why is there no remission of sins without the shedding of blood?
22. How often has Christ offered Himself? What was the purpose of His sacrifice?
23. What is meant by "appointed?"
24. What follows death? What are the implications of that in reference to such teachings as purgatory, prayer for the dead, reincarnation, etc.?
25. For what purpose will Christ appear again?

Lesson Five: The Superiority of Christ's Sacrifice

Text: Hebrews 10:1-39

1. In what way was the law “a shadow of good things to come?”
2. What would have been some consequences if the sacrifices of the old law had made those who offered them perfect?
3. Why was it impossible for the “blood of bulls and goats to take away sins?”
4. To whom does the quotation of prophecy found in verses five through seven pertain? In what way?
5. Taking your answer from the context of this passage, why was the first will taken away?
6. What is meant by the phrase “once for all” which is used to describe the sacrifice of Christ?
7. What does “sanctified” mean? Who is sanctified? How have they been sanctified?
8. Why is there not to be another offering for sin?
9. How can Christians enter the Holiest with boldness?
10. How is one's heart “sprinkled from an evil conscience” and body “washed with pure water?”
11. Why should Christians “stir up” one another “to love and good works?”
12. What does it mean to forsake the assembling of yourselves together?
13. Does this passage teach that there is no forgiveness for willful sins? Explain your answer.
14. How can one “trample the Son of God underfoot?”
15. Why is it a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God?
16. What had the “former days” accomplished for the recipients of this epistle?
17. In what way did the recipients of this letter need endurance?
18. What happens to the one who “draws back” and shirks his God-given responsibilities?

Lesson Six: The Superiority of Christ's Way - The Way of Faith • Part I

Text: Hebrews 11:1 - 12:29

1. How is faith defined?
2. In relation to faith, what is meant by:
 - a. Substance?
 - b. Evidence?
3. Why did faith allow the “elders” (men of old) to gain approval of God?
4. What relation does faith have to the creation of the universe?
5. Why is it impossible to please God without faith?
6. What must one believe in order to come to God?
7. What common factor(s) is seen in all of the illustrations of faith presented in chapter 11?
8. What is meant in 11:13 that all the faithful cited in the chapter died “not having received the promises?” (cf. v. 39)
9. In what way were these faithful ones “strangers and pilgrims on the earth?” What kind of “city” has God prepared for them?
10. What is meant by the phrase “they should not be made perfect apart from us” which is applied to the examples of faith given in chapter 11?
11. What conclusion does the writer reach based on the examples of faith of the 11th chapter?
12. What sin easily besets us? Why?
13. How is Jesus “the author and finisher of our faith?”
14. How, as suggested in the text, can one keep from being weary and discouraged in his soul?
15. How should one view the chastening of the Lord? What good things can it accomplish for the Christian?
16. What, according to chapter 12, is to be pursued? Why?
17. What is the example of Esau? Why is it cited here?
18. How is the terror of the old covenant contrasted to the mercy of the new?
19. What is “the blood...that speaks better things than that of Abel?”
20. What kingdom “cannot be shaken?” What is the advantage(s) of being in it?

Lesson Seven: The Superiority of Christ's Way - The Way of Faith • Part II

Text: Hebrews 13:1-25

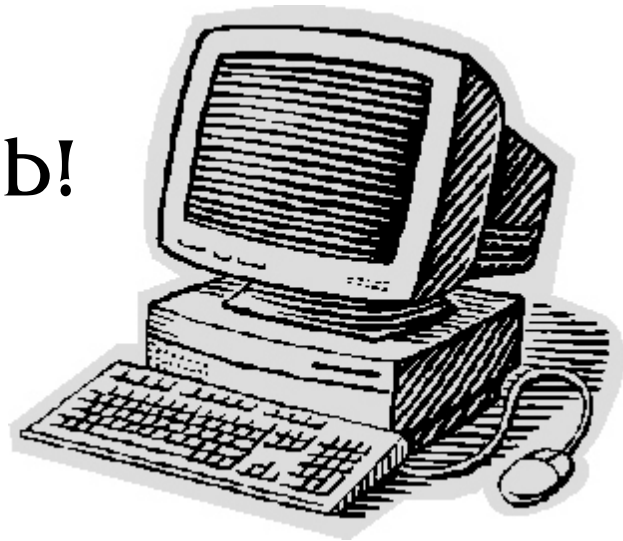
1. What does “continue” mean? How does that concept apply to brotherly love?
2. What is suggested as an incentive for hospitality? Cite some Old Testament instances of where this was done. What application, if any, does this have to us today?
3. What “prisoners” are to be remembered? Why?
4. How is marriage to be viewed? What does “undefiled” mean as used here?
5. How do covetousness and contentment contrast?
6. From the instructions of verses 7 and 17, what is to be one's attitudes and actions toward elders? Why?
7. How is it that Jesus is “the same yesterday, today and forever?”
8. How does one keep from being carried away by strange doctrines?
9. What is the purpose of the reference to the Old Testament sacrifices and the matter of eating?
10. What does it mean that Jesus “suffered outside the gate?” What should be our response to His suffering?
11. What is meant by:
 - a. “The sacrifice of praise?”
 - b. “The fruit of our lips?”
12. How is it possible for an elder to discharge his responsibilities with joy and not with grief?
13. Why did the writer desire the prayers of his readers?
14. How can God make a person “complete (perfect) in every good work to do His will?”
15. How could they “bear with the word of exhortation?”
16. Who was Timothy? What is said of him? What does that imply?

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