

THE VISUAL WORD

ILLUSTRATED OUTLINES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS



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MATTHEW

FULFILLMENT

Matthew is the doorway
of the New Testament.

A disciple of Jesus scripts the story of Jesus in the shape of the Old Testament. He teaches readers how the new fulfills the old. Jesus completes, fills up, and satisfies the story that began in Genesis. Matthew sets his eyes on Jesus, training future generations to walk in the footsteps of their Rabbi. Jesus is the Messiah, the new Abraham (who has many children from the East and West), the new David (who is the true king), the new Solomon (who is wise), the new Moses (who delivers the Torah), and the new Jeremiah (who laments the fate of Jerusalem).

The early church associated Matthew with a human face because of the theme of revelation. His outline closely tracks with the Old Testament story. He begins with a genealogy (1:1-17), echoing Genesis, and ends with a commission from Jesus (28:18-20) that mirrors Cyrus's at the end of 2 Chronicles. In the center are Jesus' parables about the mystery of the kingdom (13), causing readers to recall the wisdom tradition. The rest of the narrative fills out Israel's history. Jesus is supernaturally born, saved from a tyrant king, comes out of Egypt, goes through the water, into the wilderness, up the mountain, heals, sends out His disciples, and prophetically pronounces both judgment and hope upon those who listen. Ultimately, Jesus undergoes exile in His death. However, He is raised to life because of His innocent blood. He is the Mosaic-Davidic King.

MATTHEW / FULFILLMENT



WHO IS JESUS? 1

He is the son of David, the son of Abraham, and the Son of God.



WHERE IS HE FROM? 2

Jesus is from Bethlehem, Egypt, and Nazareth.



Preparation 3-4

Jesus is baptized by John and tempted.



Healings 8-9

The kingdom spreads; Jesus calls followers.



Rejection 11-12

Jesus is rejected, and reveals His true family.



Revelation 14-17

Jesus is transfigured before the disciples.



Reproof 21-22

Jesus enters Jerusalem and condemns it.



Wholeness 5-7

Flourishing comes by listening to Christ.



Witness 10

Jesus sends the disciples to proclaim the kingdom.



Mystery 13

Teaching on the mystery of the kingdom of God.



Household 18-20

Jesus' instructions and ethics for the church.



Judgment 23-25

Jesus gives the verdict on Israel's leaders.



CRUCIFIXION 26-27

Jesus submits to a kingly trial and death.



RESURRECTION 28

The victory of life, Jesus' commission and promise.



WHO IS JESUS? (1)

A list of names. It's an odd way to begin. But the genealogy shows readers this isn't a fairy tale, but a true story. Matthew opens with his convictions fully exposed. Jesus is the Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham (1:1). The genealogy gives a Davidic family tree that proves Jesus is the new King of Israel. Not only that, but genealogies function prominently in the Old Testament with the promise of a seed (Gen. 3:15). Surprisingly, some in Jesus' family are Gentile women with checkered sexual pasts. They are all characterized by tenacious fidelity to Yahweh. However, Matthew's genealogy isn't primarily about people, but about a child and God Himself. God carries along this family line despite their failures (1:1-17). If the genealogy shows Jesus is the son of David and Abraham, then the birth narrative displays Jesus as the Son of God and son of Joseph (1:18-25). Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit. Joseph names Him according to the angel's command, thereby adopting Him. Joseph and Mary's situation resembles and fulfills Abraham's and Sarah's: both have supernatural births. Matthew 1 fulfills Genesis: a new creation, a new humanity, has arrived.



WHERE IS HE FROM? (2)

Some may have had questions about Jesus' origins. Matthew proves that all the places Jesus hails from fulfill Old Testament texts. He is their predicted Messiah. First, Jesus is from Bethlehem, the city of David (2:1-12). But another king already resides in Bethlehem, so Jesus and His family must flee. Herod is a tyrant (like Pharaoh) who acts violently against his people. Mary's child will be a Shepherd-King leading His people to quiet waters. Second, Jesus is from Egypt (2:13-15). Like Israel, Jesus must flee into Egypt for safety, but He and His people will come out of exile. This point is further reinforced by a reference to Ramah (2:16-18). Ramah was the place Israel departed for exile (Jer. 40:1), and now Rachel weeps for her children who are killed by Herod, but the hope of Jeremiah 31 is that the children shall come back to their own country. Finally, Jesus is from Nazareth. Nazareth derives from the word branch in Hebrew, and therefore fulfills the promise of a Davidic Branch (Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8). All of these places prove Jesus is their long-awaited Shepherd-King.



Preparation (3-4) / The Old Testament shadow stories continue. Jesus goes through water (3), into the wilderness (4), and then up the mountain (5-7). The first narrative puts John the Baptist in the shadow of Jesus with new exodus themes. John is the voice preparing the way for Jesus to bring His people out of exile (3:3). Jesus is baptized by John and anointed as the Messiah (3:13-17). Then Jesus is led into the wilderness to be tempted

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like Israel and Adam by Satan (4:1-11). But unlike Israel and Adam, He does not fail. He fully trusts God's Word, even when He is brought up to a high mountain and told He can be King without suffering. Jesus withdraws into Galilee because of John's death and begins His ministry centered on the announcement of the kingdom of heaven (4:12-22). He will not return to Jerusalem until His death.



Wholeness (5-7) / The Sermon on the Mount is one of the most famous passages in the Scriptures. In it, Jesus acts as the new Moses, mediating the new Torah. The sermon concerns what it means to flourish, to be whole, to be blessed in God's creation. Jesus argues this comes by having an all-encompassing righteousness: both inward and outward. The Torah was always meant to regulate human hearts, but it could not because of their sin and the lack of the Spirit. Jesus begins with words of comfort for those in exile (5:1-12). He offers them the upside-down kingdom. Then He gives them His thesis: He came to fulfill the Torah, teaching them about greater righteousness (5:17-20). This means they need to follow the true intention of the Torah (5:17-48), continue in giving to the poor, praying, and fasting (6:1-18), and finally, perform justice (6:19-7:12). Ultimately, they must love God and others (see 7:12). Jesus closes with a warning: they can take two paths, follow two prophets, and build on two different foundations (7:13-29). One path means life, the other death. One foundation means destruction, the other wholeness.



Healings (8-9) / Jesus has spoken of the kingdom; now He enacts the kingdom through His deeds. Ultimately, this paints Him as the Suffering Servant who gives His life for others. He welcomes the least likely into the kingdom. He brings the new creation by the touch of His hand. Nine miracles occur, many of them matching and reversing failures of the wilderness generation. First, Jesus comes to the marginalized: a man with leprosy, a centurion's servant, and Peter's mother-in-law (8:1-17). Then He calls others to follow Him, but many of them view it as too costly (8:18-22). Three more miracles occur: Jesus stills the storm, casts out demons, and heals a paralytic, forgiving his sins (8:23-9:8). Again, the narrative pauses as Jesus calls Matthew to come and follow Him, contrasting Matthew's response with those who refused earlier (9:9-17). Three final healings occur: Jesus heals the ruler's daughter and the sick woman, two blind men, and another demon-possessed man (9:18-34). The harvest is ripe, but more workers are needed (9:37).

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Witness (10) / Matthew 1–9 has the shape of the Pentateuch. Chapter 10 begins with the conquest and entry into the land as Jesus sends out His disciples. The picture presented is one of taking territory for the kingdom of heaven, similar to the conquest of Canaan. After Jesus identifies the messengers (10:1–4), He tells them of their message, mission, and tools (10:5–10). They are to go into the land, let their peace fall on houses that welcome them, but judgment upon those that don't (10:11–15). When they enter the land, they will face persecution (10:16–42). They will be delivered over to courts, but they should not be anxious. There will be family division, but they are to endure to the end. They will be maligned, but they are to have no fear. Ultimately, if they acknowledge Jesus, He will acknowledge them. If they lose their life, they will find it.



Rejection (11–12) / If chapter 10 mirrored Israel's conquest, then Matthew 11–12 is about the monarchy and the various response to the new King. Jesus is questioned and rejected, but He defines His true family. Jesus continues to be presented as the new David. He is also the new Solomon. Three panels make up these chapters. First, Jesus is questioned on various issues: Is He the one they should be expecting (11:3), why do His disciples do what is not lawful on the Sabbath (12:2), and can this be the Son of David (12:23)? Jesus responds saying He is their redemption (11:5–6), He is like David but greater, and a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand (12:25–37). Then He condemns this generation for their unresponsiveness (11:16–24; 12:38–45). Ultimately, He says the kingdom is for little children (11:25), Gentiles (12:15–21), and those who do His will (12:46–50). His true family is being formed. Some are stumbling on the rock; others are built upon it.



Mystery (13) / The third discourse contains parables on the mystery of the kingdom. It parallels the wisdom tradition. Jesus describes the mystery of the kingdom and speaks in poetic form like David (Psalms) and his son Solomon (Proverbs). Matthew explicitly quotes from the Wisdom Literature, saying that these words fulfill the saying, "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world" (Matt. 13:35; see Ps. 78:2). Jesus speaks about the *responses* to the kingdom message (13:1–23), the *growth* of the kingdom (13:24–43), and finally the *value* of the kingdom (13:44–52). He compares the kingdom to soil, a tree, a treasure, a pearl, and a net. Though His hearers might think they understand the kingdom plan, Jesus says it will grow slowly, be a mixed community, but is worth a greater price than anything this world has to offer. The mystery of the kingdom is that it is like a seed planted in the ground that looks unimpressive today. One day it will be a towering tree. The nations will find shade under it.

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Revelation (14-17) / In chapters 14-17, Jesus reveals who He is through both Peter's confession and the transfiguration. But responses to Jesus also take center stage as Matthew moves out of the monarchy and wisdom tradition to the divided kingdom. Echoes of Elijah and Elisha fill out the narrative as Jesus continues to fulfill the Old Testament. Though Jesus is rejected in His hometown of Nazareth, He feeds the Jews as a greater prophet than Moses (13:53-14:36). Jesus clarifies defilement comes from the inside, not the outside (15:1-20). A more positive response is given by Gentiles, particularly a Canaanite woman, and Jesus feeds the Gentiles as well (15:21-39). The varying responses to Jesus come to a head when they ask Him for a sign, but He rebukes them for the question (16:1-12). This leads to Jesus revealing who He truly is to Peter, but even the disciples misunderstand His mission (16:13-27). Jesus shows them His glory on the mountain in the transfiguration as Moses and Elijah appear next to Him, but as they come off the mountain, the disciples still don't understand the only way to glory is through suffering (17:9-23).



Household (18-20) / The fourth discourse continues the prophetic theme and centers on the remnant, the new people of God. Through Jesus' visionary words, He establishes, teaches, and instructs His church. The new community even has its own structures of authority and the presence of God to enforce standards. The text is a household code for Jesus' new community, where He teaches them to be peaceable, forgive, and care for one another. In chapter 18, He tells them to reflect on their identity. They are to become like children in humility (18:1-6) and care for little ones (18:10-14). Likewise, they are instructed to be peacemakers (18:15-35) and care for one another, seeking out reconciliation. In chapter 19 they are instructed on domestic ethics: divorce (19:3-12), children (19:13-15), and wealth (19:16-30). Finally, chapter 20 sums up their vocation as His body. They are to be the last rather than first (20:1-16) and become servants to all (20:17-34). The remnant will be God's new community, His new household.



Reproof (21-22) / Matthew 21 marks a definite shift. Though Jesus has given hope to His remnant, from here onward Jesus is the "judging prophet." He enters the city of Jerusalem on a colt. Rather than coming into the city as the conquering and victorious Messiah, Jesus acts as the condemning prophet. Three related symbolic temple acts exemplify this (21). First, He confronts the temple system. Second, He castigates the leaders of Israel. Third, He foretells the temple's destruction. For Israel, the destruction of the temple and exile went hand in hand. Jesus is the new prophet denouncing the nation for their sins. The chapter ends with questions about where Jesus gets His authority (21:23-27), but He won't answer them. Then Jesus tells three parables about people not being obedient or ready for His return (21:28-22:14). The religious leaders question Him on three hot

topics, trying to trap Him: politics, eschatology, and the interpretation of the Old Testament (22:15–40). Jesus halts the conversation by asking them a question they cannot answer (22:41–46). His wisdom and inspiration are unmatched. He is God’s prophet.



Judgment (23–25) / In the final discourse, Jesus condemns the religious leaders as the rebuking prophet. This matches the censure by Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah. He looks at Israel’s leaders and pronounces judgment upon them using seven woes to condemn them, providing a contrast to the Beatitudes (23:1–36). Then Jesus laments the fate of Jerusalem (23:37–39). Matthew 24–25 describes both the end of the temple period and the end of the world in apocalyptic terms—exile is coming. The discourse begins with Jesus looking at the temple and predicting its destruction (24:1–2). The glory of the Lord is leaving the temple, as Ezekiel prophesied. For Jesus, the glory of the Lord is not only leaving the temple; the temple must also be destroyed. The last day is coming and no one knows the hour, but they all must be ready for the return of the King (24:36–25:30). When He returns, He will be a judging Shepherd, separating the sheep from the goats (25:31–46). Jesus has condemned the current generation. Now He will go and die for them.



CRUCIFIXION (26–27)

If Matthew is following the history of the Old Testament, the next thing that should happen is the destruction of the temple and the exile. Blood should fill this section as the people of Israel are attacked and destroyed by their enemies. The blood of Israel is spilled, but it is innocent blood. Jesus’ blood. Blood turns out to be not only the cue to the exile and destruction of the temple but also the prompt for the rebuilding of the temple and the return from exile. Blood is both the curse and the cure. It lies at the center of Israel’s future. First, Jesus prepares for His death under the banner of the Passover (26:1–46), then He is arrested and goes through trials (26:47–27:26), and finally He is crucified (27:27–66). His crucifixion is painted in royal hues as He is enthroned upon the hill of the skull. The King has been crowned. Hope comes in the most unexpected way.



RESURRECTION (28)

Death cannot stop innocent blood. Jesus conquers death by life. Jesus ends the exile through abundant life. Women come to visit the tomb of Jesus, but He is not there. Jesus meets them and tells them they have no reason to fear, while at the same time the chief priests craft a false tale about the disciples stealing Jesus' body (28:1-15). Then Jesus goes to a mountain in Galilee with the disciples. He gives them the command to make disciples of all nations because He has been given all authority as the Son of Man (28:16-20). He is not only the King of the Jews but the one presented before the Ancient of Days. Jesus promises His presence will be with them forever. Chronicles, the last book of the Hebrew Old Testament, also ends with a note about the restoration to come (2 Chron. 36:22-23). Cyrus gives a commission for Israel to go up to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Now the disciples are the temple-builders. They go out with the message and healing of King Jesus. His birth, life, death, and resurrection has fulfilled all that was predicted in the Old Testament.

EPHESIANS

COSMIC RECONCILIATION

The invisible realm is real.

An unseen battle has been raging from the beginning of time. Ephesians soars to heights unknown to the human eye. Paul writes to those in Ephesus telling them the cosmic story of heaven, earth, and the powers. This celestial reality has common consequences. God's cosmic plan should form how they relate to neighbors formed from the dust. What happens in the heavens reverberates on earth. The two realms are linked by the body of Christ.

Paul's argument begins from the widest angle and moves to the most intimate relationships in households. He asserts God's overarching plan is to unite all things in heaven and earth in Christ Jesus. Cosmic reconciliation. This results in new lives, new relationships, new behaviors, new loyalties, and new power. But this all stems from the triumph of Christ over the powers of darkness. Paul transforms their imagination by showing them what God has done for them in Christ (1-3). He then encourages them to embody God's victory by subversive performances (4-6). They stand against the powers in the strength of their victorious King.

EPHESIANS / COSMIC RECONCILIATION



COSMIC 1



CHURCH 2



PAUL 3



Trinity's Work 1:1-14



Dead to Alive 2:1-10



Steward 3:1-13



Prayer 1:15-23



New Temple 2:11-22



Prayer 3:14-21



Unity 4:1-16

PARTICIPATION 4-6

The church participates in the triumph of Christ, living by new standards and in new relationships.



Warfare 6:10-24



New Creation 4:17-32



Households 5:22-6:9



Love & Light 5:1-14



Wisdom 5:15-21



COSMIC (1)

Paul begins with the widest lens possible: before time and in the heavens. By so doing, Paul transforms their imaginations and puts their personal narratives in the larger scope of the universe. The triune God's plan before time was to sum up all things in heaven and earth (1:9-10). He did this through respective actions of each person of the Trinity (1:1-14). This is meant to encourage those in Ephesus in the midst of their daily walk with Christ. After Paul has detailed the cosmic plan, he prays that they would have spiritual eyes to see the beauty and splendor of this mystery (1:15-23). God's plan is to unite all things in the Head and His body.



Trinity's Work (1:1-14) / Praise be to God. That is Paul's main point. He praises God for the work of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Their plan is to unite the cosmos in the Son. He begins with the Father's work (1:3-6a). God chooses His people. He chose them for a new vocation and family. They are to be holy and part of His household. They therefore have a new heritage and birthright. This all comes through the Son, the Beloved. The Son's gift is redemption (1:6b-8). By His blood, His people go through the water, receive forgiveness of sins, and the enemy is defeated. This redemption displays that God's plan is to sum up all things in Christ, things in heaven and on earth (1:9-10). If the Father orchestrates and the Son redeems, then the Spirit's gift is His presence as a seal (1:13-14). The Spirit is the down payment of the inheritance. Jews and Gentiles have the same inheritance through the work of the Spirit.



Prayer (1:15-23) / Paul has explained the cosmic plan, and now he prays. They need to have spiritual eyes to see the gifts of the Godhead (1:18). It would be too easy to read over these truths and shrug. So Paul prays. He prays that they would have wisdom, revelation, and knowledge (1:18-19). He prays that their eyes would pierce the darkness so they can see three realities. First, the hope of His calling (1:18). Second, the amazing inheritance that is theirs (1:18). Finally, and most importantly, to know the power that was worked on believers' behalf (1:19-23). Jesus was raised from the dead and seated above the powers of darkness. Christ is the head of creation and the new creation. Christ's power is their power. He is the victorious and triumphant Messiah, who has subjected every other power under His rule. He rules over His church, His body, which is going to fill all things: things on heaven and on earth.



CHURCH (2)

If Paul began with the widest lens, now he focuses on how this cosmic plan is manifested in the church. His prayer in chapter 1 ended with how Christ's body (His church) will fill all things. Now Paul details how this will take place: Jews and Gentiles will become the new creation and temple. He begins with creation imagery: they were dead but are now alive by Christ's victory (2:1-10). Then he transitions to temple imagery, arguing that through Christ's blood, Jews and Gentiles together become the temple that is built on Christ (2:11-22). In sum, he gives both creational and covenantal images. Jesus is both the victorious King and the sacrificial Lamb. Christ's body will fill the earth as they are united under Him.



Dead to Alive (2:1-10) / The body of Christ will fill all creation, but how? Paul explains it is by a work of new creation, a new enthronement, a new humanity. Previously, they were dead (2:1-3). They stood under the powers. The world, Satan himself, and the flesh attacked them, producing God's wrath. But now God has made them alive with Christ, raised them with Him, and seated them with Him (2:4-7). Christ's benefits are their benefits. This all came about because of God's gift, God's blessing (2:8-10). It was not because of their good works, but because of His gift. Therefore, they can now walk in the new creation and the good works that God has prepared for them. Being alive, raised, and seated means they have a new earthly vocation from their heavenly Lord. Cosmic reconciliation is embodied on earth.



New Temple (2:11-22) / The imagery now switches from creation to covenant metaphors. Paul moves from separation of Jews and Gentiles to unity. This only comes through blood. Previously, Gentiles were outside the temple people (2:11-12). They were separated and strangers to the people of God and therefore to God Himself. But they have been brought near through the blood of the Lamb (2:13-18). Those who were far off have been brought near. Those who were hostile to one another now have peace. Those who were antagonistic to God have been reconciled. Christ killed the hostility between these two groups on the cross, bringing them both together as His body. Now they are being made into the new temple (2:19-22). They are no longer strangers and separated, but they are members of God's house. The Ephesian Christians are pillars in His temple, stones in His walls, and growing into a dwelling place for God. Jesus is not only the sacrificial Lamb but also the cornerstone on which this temple people is built. A new temple is being formed where heaven and earth collide.



PAUL (3)

Paul began with a cosmic snapshot, then he moved to a church snapshot; now he turns to his own role in this management of the plan to sum up all things in Christ (3:1-13). The reason Paul is a prisoner is because God has made him a manager and ambassador of God's grace and the revealed secret. He expresses Christ's victory through suffering. This mystery was not made known before; now it has been revealed that Gentiles are partners in the promise of the gospel. This is the uniting of heaven of earth. Paul's role is to proclaim and bring light to this mystery. Even the powers of darkness look at this plan and are amazed. Paul closes this section of the letter with another prayer (3:14-21). He asks for strength in their hearts for God to do exactly what he has outlined.



Steward (3:1-13) / Paul wishes to transition to his prayer for Ephesus in light of the church's role in God's plan, but he must stop and explain why he is in prison. The victory of Christ and his suffering seem at odds. However, Paul's suffering manifests the plan. His life is an example to follow. Suffering is how Paul expresses God's victory. Paul explains his relationship to the mystery (3:2-7) and the mystery's relationship to the cosmic plan (3:8-13). Paul is a steward of this mystery. It came to him by revelation. The content of the mystery is that Gentiles are coheirs, partakers in the promises with Jews. This is a more specific definition of the mystery than in chapter 1, where he argued it concerns all things (on heaven and earth) being summed up in Christ (1:9-10). Paul's role is to shine light on this revealed secret, and that is why he is in prison. Even the powers look down on the church and are amazed at this plan. This is why he is bold.



Prayer (3:14-21) / Paul closes the first half of his letter with another prayer. He pleads for his listeners that they might be able to exemplify this cosmic plan in their lives. In so doing, he summarizes his themes and speaks to how this applies to their lives. He returns to his heaven-and-earth theme, bowing his "knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (3:14-15). Then he prays three things for his readers. First, that they might have strength so that Christ may dwell in them (3:16-18). If Christ's body is going to fill the earth, they will need help to have Him overhaul their lives. Second, they need to know the greatness of the love and power of Christ (3:19-20). To be the new temple will take a reservoir of love that is unending. Finally, he prays that they might be full of God (3:21). God's presence was in the temple, and now they are the temple. Paul prays that the cosmic and theological reality might become a personal reality.

COSMIC RECONCILIATION



Unity (4:1-16) / The second half of Ephesians details how those in Ephesus can participate in the triumph of Christ. Paul continually returns to “walking” imagery in this section. He first tells them they need to walk in unity, but not uniformity (4:1-6). They are to be unified because their God is one. This unity is already theirs in the Spirit, but they are still to make an effort. This daily exercise stems from Paul’s theology of God, the church, and the future. There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God. But this call to unity does not smother diversity (4:7-16). God has given diverse gifts to His church. When Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father, He distributed a variety of gifts to His church. His ascent should remind them of Christ’s victorious descent to the dead. Both His descent and ascent prove Christ conquered all spaces. He gave people as gifts to the church so that they might build a new temple on earth.



New Creation (4:17-32) / Not only are they to embody God’s victory by walking in unity but also by walking in the new creation. The old humanity walked in darkness, futility, ignorance, and had no life because of their hard hearts (4:17-19). But that is not the way they were trained in Christ. Through the Spirit they now have hearts of flesh rather than of stone. They were taught to put off the old human and to put on the new human, who is Christ (4:20-24). Jesus is the truth. They are to perform the actions of a new self, according to God’s image. They are the new Adams and Eves. Paul then details the virtues of the new human in contrast to the old human (4:25-32). Put off lying, put on truth. Put off anger, put on self-control. Put off stealing, and put on work hard. Put off filthy talk, put on edifying speech. Put off bitterness, and put on a tender heart. These are new creation realities. This is heaven and earth reconciled as God’s image shines through His new people.



Love & Light (5:1-14) / Embodying the new creation means walking in love and light. Love reminds people of the two greatest commands; light reminds readers of new creation images. Christ is love and light. This love is most clearly seen in Christ’s sacrifice for His people on the cross and is contrasted with self-love. Self-love is defined here in terms of sexual immorality, greed, and crude jokes. All of these vices reveal more concern for oneself than other image bearers. Thanksgiving should replace these corruptions. If they continue in sexual promiscuity, greed, and crude jokes, their end is destruction, the kingdom of darkness, and God’s wrath (5:1-6). Chaos and destruction await those who turn from God. But they are no longer in darkness. They are in the light (5:7-14). The kingdom of light consists of goodness, righteousness, and truth. When the true light comes it will expose the darkness. They were once held sway by the powers of darkness, but light has come! Therefore, they must arise, wake up from the dead, and Christ’s light will shine on them (5:14).

EPHESIANS



Wisdom (5:15-21) / Participation in the triumph of Christ also means walking in wisdom (5:15-16). Jesus is the new Solomon, the true, wise King upon whom the Spirit rests. He listened to His Father's instruction, took the narrow path, and chose the tree of life. Foolishness means squandering the time they have in this dark world (5:17). Satan is still the prince of the power of the air, who tempts and accuses them. They therefore need to understand the will of the Lord and be filled with the Spirit (rather than wine) like their wise teacher (5:18). This will result in songs, hymns, thanksgiving, and submission to all (5:19-21). The next section on households is a subsection of the wisdom theme.



Households (5:22-6:9) / Paul applies this wisdom to households. The war for the cosmos takes place on the ground through the interactions of husbands and wives, masters and slaves, and parents and children. This too is cosmic reconciliation. Paul calls on husbands and wives to perform both standard and subversive tasks (5:22-33). Wives are to submit to husbands, and husbands are to love their wives. This model is built on Christ's relationship with His church, His body. Children are to obey parents, so they may partake of the new creation, and fathers are to be kind and gentle with their children (6:1-4). Slaves are to obey their masters and live as if they are serving Christ. Slavery was a large part of society, and Paul was a member of a minority movement. He wrote to people in bad situations, instructing them how to live in a fallen creation. Masters likewise are to treat slaves kindly, knowing they too sit under a master (6:5-9). Some of these commands are standard. But Paul also speaks subversively. He addresses the marginalized groups first, gives them ethical volition, and cuts the husbands and masters down to size.



Warfare (6:10-24) / Ephesians appropriately ends with the battle between heaven and earth. The two realms overlap. Paul commands those in Ephesus to stand in warfare (6:10-20). Their fight is not against humans, but against the supernatural dark powers. They are therefore to stand and resist the dark powers. They stand not in their own strength but in the strength of the Lord (6:10-12). He is their Warrior. He is their conquering King. They put on His armor, and this means having faith, righteousness, peace, the Word of God, and looking toward their present and future salvation with prayer (6:13-20). Paul closes telling them he is sending another ambassador for their encouragement (6:21-24). A cosmic drama is unfolding. Their continual decision is whether they will live in the light or in darkness.

HEBREWS

SUPERIORITY OF THE SON

The temptation is to turn back to what is known,
what is easy, what is traditional.

Hebrews warns readers to not fall away from the superiority of Jesus Christ. Though the author of Hebrews is unknown, the subject is not. Hebrews is a sermon explaining how Jesus is superior to the old covenant system and a call to not fall away. The focus is on the law and priesthood, giving the most detailed argument in the Bible for Jesus as the Great High Priest, who has gone into heaven and now intercedes for believers. All can draw near to God through Him.

Hebrews contends that Jesus is superior to various Old Testament systems, and therefore warns readers to not fall away from Christ. The first four verses give the point in short: Jesus is the superior revelation (1:1-4). The rest of the sermon explains how. Jesus is superior to the angels who mediated the law (1-2); therefore they need to pay closer attention. Jesus is superior to Moses (3-4); therefore they need to watch out that they don't harden their hearts. Jesus is the superior priest unstained from sin and serving in a better tent (5-7); therefore they need to mature. Jesus is the superior sacrifice and covenant who purified His people once and for all (8-10); therefore they should draw near to God. The author closes by telling them to persevere, looking to Jesus as their forerunner (11-13).

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SUPERIOR WORD 1:1-4

Christ, the superior revelation.



Angels 1-2

Superior to angels.



Moses 3-4

Superior to Moses.



Priest 5-7

Superior High Priest.



Sacrifice 8-10

Superior sacrifice.



Pay Attention 2:1-4

Be on your guard.



Watch Out 3:7-4:13

Don't harden your hearts.



Mature 5:11-6:12

Grow in the faith.



Draw Near 10:19-39

Enter through the curtain.



Hall of Faith 11

A cloud of witnesses.



Run the Race 12

Don't lose heart.



Final Appeal 13

Various commands.



SUPERIOR WORD (1:1-4)

Hebrews begins with comparison and contrast. Previously, God communicated to His people through the prophets; now He speaks through His Son. Jesus is the superior revelation. This is the foundation for the rest of the sermon. Jesus is better than what came before because of His more excellent nature and name. Jesus is the heir of all things, the Creator of all, the exact nature of God, and the upholder of the universe. He is more excellent because He is the greater prophet, priest, and king, but the focus is on His priestly nature. He has made purification for sins and sat down at the right hand of God. He has received the name of Son, which is superior to all other names. The rest of the argument flows from the nature of the Son and His work.



Angels (1-2) / Jesus is superior to angels. Angels delivered the law; they were the mediators (Deut. 33:2; Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2). But now the Mediator of God's or Christ's law is the Son. His name is superior to theirs. Numerous quotes from the Old Testament support this. The angels worship the Son because His throne is forever and ever. None of the angels were ever told to sit at the right hand of God, but the Son is currently reigning in heaven. Angels serve, while the Son is supreme (1:5-14). He was made a man so that He could share in their nature and defeat death by enduring it. Now He helps mankind as their faithful and merciful high priest (2:5-18). Jesus was made lower than angels for a time, but now He reigns in heaven, crowned with glory and honor because of His suffering.



Pay Attention (2:1-4) / In the middle of the meditation on the Son's superiority to angels, the author warns his audience. He tells them to pay closer attention to what they have heard because if the law mediated by angels required punishment for transgressing it, then how much more will they be punished if they break the law of Christ (2:1-3). They have a new Mediator. God has confirmed and affirmed the reality of His Son by bearing witness with signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit (2:4). They can trust this message, which was given through Jesus. If disobedience to the law was punished, then so will disobedience to the Son. In fact, the Son offers a better salvation, so the punishment will be worse if they turn away from God's unique Servant.



Moses (3-4) / Jesus is now compared and contrasted with Moses. Both angels and Moses were known as mediators of the law and associated with the temple. Moses was faithful as a servant, but Jesus is superior because He built the house, while Moses was simply a helper in God's house. Jesus is the cornerstone of His people, while Moses is a stone. Jesus is the Son, while Moses is the servant (3:1-6). As in the previous section on angels

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(2:5-18), the author closes the section by returning to the high priest theme (4:14-16). Since believers have a high priest who has gone into heaven, they need to hold fast so that they don't fall like the wilderness generation. Their High Priest is able to sympathize with them, but He never sinned. They can therefore approach God's throne and receive help in time of need. The wilderness generation had no priest like the Son.



Watch Out (3:7-4:13) / In the midst of speaking of Moses's faithfulness, the author directly addresses Israel's unfaithfulness (3:7-19). The wilderness generation heard God's promises but fell in the desert. They did not enter God's rest because their hearts were hard. Therefore, the listeners should also be warned of an unbelieving heart. They might become like the generation that failed to enter God's Sabbath. The promise of rest still stands, so the people should fear that they not become like the rebellious generation (4:1-13). Israel's hard hearts kept them out of the promised land. But the promise of rest still stands for believers who follow Jesus. If Israel fell while following Moses, how much worse will it be for those who fall while following Jesus? Therefore, they should watch out. They too might perish.



Priest (5-7) / Jesus is not only superior to angels and Moses, but He is the superior high priest (6:13-20). Believers have a merciful and forever high priest. Jesus comes in the line of Melchizedek and learned obedience by suffering. In the old order, high priests were taken from among men, acted on behalf of men, and offered gifts and sacrifices (5:1-4). In the new order, Jesus was also appointed, but He did not have any weaknesses or sins, and He doesn't have to offer sacrifices for Himself (5:5-10). Though Jesus was appointed, He learned obedience as a man. He was made complete through His suffering. Jesus became an eternal priest after the order of Melchizedek (7). Melchizedek was a figurative eternal priest, and Jesus fulfills his role. Even Levites paid tribute to Melchizedek. The old priesthood is out of date and could not perfect. The new priesthood has arrived.



Mature (5:11-6:12) / The author wants to describe more about Jesus' superior priesthood, but he can't. His listeners are children in the faith. They need to mature. They should be adults, but they still need baby food. They should be teachers, but they still need elementary doctrine (5:11-14). Therefore, he urges them to grow up. They need to turn from old practices and go on to adulthood. For if they have been shown the truth and turn back again to the old ways, it is impossible to bring them back (6:4-8). If they don't bear fruit, they will be burned in the fire. Though the author warns them, he feels confident in their case. They have shown evidence of faith and love. He hopes they persevere, mature, and find life in the superior priest (6:9-12).



Sacrifice (8-10) / If the previous section proved that Jesus was a superior priest, then the next two chapters focus on the ministry of the priest. Jesus is the superior sacrifice who mediates a superior covenant. He ministers in the new tent. If priests are appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices, then Jesus offers His own body and blood. This shows that the first covenant had faults, for a second was needed (8:1-7). But the author explains that the fault was with Israel (8:8-13). In the first covenant only the high priest could enter the holy of holies. This shows the way to God was not open yet, and the sacrifices could only deal with the external (9:1-10). Jesus enters a better tent in heaven, He brings His own blood, which truly sanctifies, and He only has to enter once rather than repeatedly. Therefore, He is the Mediator of a new and better covenant (9:1-28). The Old Testament law was only a shadow; Christ is the substance. The blood of animals can't take away sins, but the body of Jesus can. A new covenant has arrived (10:1-18).



Draw Near (10:19-39) / Because Jesus is the better priest, with a better sacrifice, and the Mediator of a new covenant, the congregation should draw near to God with full assurance. They don't need the Old Testament rituals. They have a new and living way through the body of Jesus (10:19-22). They should therefore hold fast to the confession of the new covenant and consider how to encourage one another. The audience can only do this if they continue to meet together and remind one another of Christ's sacrifice on their behalf. If they turn back to the old system, judgment awaits. If people died under the Mosaic Law, how much more will people be punished under the new covenant (10:26-31)? Previously, they showed evidence of faith, so they shouldn't throw away their new life (10:32-35). They need to persevere (10:35-39).



Hall of Faith (11) / The audience has a heavenly cloud of witnesses encouraging them how to live on earth. Israel's history provides paradigms that serve as exhortations. The sermon is a call for perseverance and faith, a warning of what happens if one does not heed the admonitions. The hall of faith is a snapshot of enduring heroes of the faith. Though Israel had negative examples, they also have positive ones. First, the author looks at those who had faith in the unseen (11:1-7), then Abraham, the prime example, and his descendants (11:8-22), then to Moses and the exodus generation (11:23-31), and finally to a smattering of examples (11:32-40). The author encourages the readers to emulate these saints. The people of God in the Old Testament didn't have Christ, yet they had faith and endured persecution while waiting for the promises. The readers must imitate them. The Old Testament saints looked to what they could not see. The audience looks to what has come.

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Run the Race (12) / The final and climactic example of endurance in the race is Jesus. Because the audience has this cloud of witnesses, they should run the race set before them. They look back to the saints and to Jesus, who also suffered on the cross (12:1-3). The rest of the chapter expands on these exhortations to endure. They should endure discipline for holiness. This suffering is the discipline of the Lord to strengthen their faith (12:4-11). Therefore, they need to run, to fortify their hands and knees, to not falter in the race. This means being at peace, having holiness (12:12-17). If in the Old Testament Israel came before God at Mount Sinai and feared, they now come before Mount Zion, which is a vast celebration with angels and the congregation of the firstborn (12:18-24). The final warning is to not refuse the one speaking to them. If the Old Testament saints didn't escape, how will those who reject Jesus (12:25-29)?



Final Appeal (13) / A collection of commands fills out the final chapter and functions as the epilogue. It expands on what was introduced in the previous chapter: the worship and fellowship of the church. The author begins with practical expressions of love in the church (13:1-6). Love expresses itself in hospitality, caring for those in prison and those suffering. Love also expresses itself in marriage. They should not abandon one another, because Jesus will never leave them. In the second section, he tells them to remember their leaders and the suffering of Jesus (13:7-19). They should remember and obey them. In terms of suffering, they should also remember Jesus. Jesus also suffered outside the camp, so they should go out and endure with Him, for this is not their final home. The author's final words call them to prayer, point to Jesus as their Shepherd, and give a final exhortation, greeting, and benediction. Jesus will strengthen them (13:20-25). He is their high priest gone into heaven before them. They can approach God with confidence.

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