

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.***

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

#03-0998

New Jerusalem #8. Celestial

May 16, 2009

In certain groups of Christians, it is not uncommon to hear gospel songs about going to heaven, moving into mansions, and walking on golden streets. As the songs go, Jesus is coming back to remove His people from this old earth and take them to a new land and a literal city, New Jerusalem, which He is building. They sing of going to Beulah land and a land far beyond the sky. These tunes might be catchy, so to speak, and get one's feet moving, but are they according to Scripture? Is our destiny a literal land far, far out in the universe? Are we destined to be divorced from anything to do with this old earth that we now call home? A search of Scripture will reveal that the answer to these questions is no.

As I have written in other issues, the new creation in Christ is New Jerusalem, for the city is a people, the complement of Christ, the dwelling of God in spirit (Ephesians 1:22; 2:22), not a physical piece of property floating some place in the universe. The land that we, as the Lord's people, are looking for is a new body in the image and likeness of the Son of God (Philippians 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2), and this only comes through resurrection and transfiguration (Romans 8:23-25). We cannot fulfill our destiny in Christ without a glorious change in our constitution; that is, we cannot fulfill it until we take on immortal, glorified, spiritual, celestial bodies (1 Corinthians 15:42-57; 2 Thessalonians 1:10). Further, the saints are to possess the kingdom of this earth (Daniel 7:18, 22) when the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Revelation 11:15). The saints are to be a kingdom and priests to God that reign upon the earth (Revelation 5:10; 20:6) and judge the world (1 Corinthians 6:2; Revelation 2:26-28; 3:21). Putting these verses together, along with others, we see that the destiny of the saints is related to what God is doing and going to do on our present earth, especially during the next eon, and this has everything to do with the kingdom of the heavens coming to earth and the saints teaching the nations righteousness (Isaiah 26:9) until the whole earth is full of the glory of the Lord (Number 14:21; Psalm 72:19; Isaiah 6:3; Habakkuk 2:14).

Now, the previous two issues of this series have focused on the verse: **But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly [celestial] Jerusalem** (Hebrews 12:22 NASB [CV]). Mount Zion and the city of the living God are one and the same, with Mount Zion being representative of the heart of the city and the glory of the kingdom of God. But there is more, for the city of the living God is called the celestial Jerusalem. To understand why I have used the word *celestial*, please refer to issue #03-09123, May 18, 2009, *Celestial [Epouranion]*. In other words, New Jerusalem is celestial, which is confirmed by the following verses.

But the Jerusalem above [i.e., celestial] **is free; she is our mother.** (Galatians 4:26 NASB)

And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God [i.e., celestial], **having been prepared like a bride having been adorned** [for] **her husband.** (Revelation 21:2 ALT)

(9) And one of the seven messengers who have the seven bowls brimming with the last seven calamities came, and he speaks with me, saying, "Hither! I shall be showing you the bride, the wife of the Lambkin." (10) And he carries me away, in spirit, on a mountain, huge and high, and shows me the holy city, Jerusalem, as it is descending out of heaven from God [i.e., celestial], **(11) having the glory from God.** (Revelation 21:9-11 CV)

For he waited for the city having foundations, whose Artificer [Builder] and Architect [Maker] is God. ... Yet now they are craving a better, that is, a celestial; wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be invoked as their God, for He makes ready for them a city. (Hebrews 11:10, 16 CV [JMT])

I realize that there is great temptation to read these verses as if they refer to a physical city, but we must throw off the shackles of tradition and embrace that which is spiritual, and when we do, we will see that celestial Jerusalem transcends that which is temporal and spatial. John was carried away **in spirit** to a huge and high mountain because he had to get away from the things of the earth to see clearly, and he had to see in spirit, which means it was not to be understood as some mere physical attraction floating in the universe so that people, 2,000 years later, could sing fanciful songs about walking on golden streets and meeting at pearly gates. The city, which is described as the wife of the Lambkin, signified something glorious to John. For an understanding of the word *Lambkin*, please see issue #03-0922, February 13, 2009, *The Lambkin [Arnion]*. It was not of this earth, for it was built by God. It was celestial, for it came forth from God who is spirit. In other words, celestial Jerusalem is spiritual Jerusalem. It represents something spiritual; it is of an entirely different realm. As I have stated in issue #03-09123, we should view celestial as spiritual, and when we do, we will see that the wife of the Lambkin is not a literal city of inorganic stones and other matter with no life but a spiritual, celestial city of living stones. In other words, the city is a body of spiritual, celestial people in the image of the Celestial One. This is what Paul tells us in his defense of the resurrection.

(40) There are bodies celestial as well as bodies terrestrial. But a different glory, indeed, is that of the celestial, yet a different that of the terrestrial, (41) another glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, for star is excelling star in glory. ... (47) The first man was out of the earth, soilish; the second Man is the Lord out of heaven. (48) Such as the soilish one is, such are those also who are soilish, and such as the Celestial One, such are those also who are celestials. (49) And according as we wear the image of the soilish, we should be wearing the image also of the Celestial. (1 Corinthians 15:40-41, 47-49 CV)

When He walked this earth over two millennia ago, Jesus spoke of His origin in the same manner as John saw New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven: **“I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh”** (John 6:51 NASB; also John 3:13, 31; 6:31, 32, 33, 38, 41, 42, 50, 58). In other words, Jesus is New Jerusalem, the celestial Jerusalem. However, it is not Him alone but Him and His entire body. Celestial Jerusalem is the very image of the Celestial as manifested in His people who are His wife, the wife of the Lambkin. Until the glorious day when His wife is presented to all creation in all her fullness, the saints are a waiting colony on earth.

But we are a colony of heaven, and we wait for the Saviour who comes from heaven. (Philippians 3:20 JMT)

Most translations of the Greek text use the phrase *citizenship in heaven* rather than *colony of heaven*; however, the Greek word means *community*, which seems to be best captured by the word *colony*. A *colony* is “a group of people who settle in a distant land but remain under the political jurisdiction of their native land” or “a community of people of the same nationality or pursuits concentrated in a particular district or place.” Another way to look at it is that a colony is an outpost in a foreign land. Paul was not making a theological statement that when we die, we go to heaven, or that in the coming eon, we will go off to a place called *heaven*, leaving this old earth behind. He was stating that those who believe on Jesus have a new constitution within them; it is not of this world; it is heavenly in character. We are from Jesus’ source or origin, and that is heavenly. We have been born from above (see my book *Born From Above*), and we have the seed of Christ in us (1 John 3:9) (see issue #02-0887, July 7, 2008, *His Seed Abides In Him*), which means that we have a new constitution within us that is growing in the womb of our mortal bodies. Christ is being formed in us (Galatians 4:19) so that, one day, we will give birth to a new man in Christ in the image of the Celestial. We must be clear that the entire body of Christ matured into the image of the Celestial is the celestial Jerusalem. Today, the body on earth is merely a colony, but a day is fast approaching when the Savior will come from heaven for His body.

To sum up, the city of the living God is the celestial Jerusalem, and the celestial Jerusalem is New Jerusalem, and New Jerusalem is a holy temple in the Lord, the dwelling of God in spirit, which is the new creation in Christ, the body of Christ, the complement of Christ that is destined to reign with Christ as He heads up or gathers up all things for God the Father so that God may be all in all new.