

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)

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Celestial [Epouranion]

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In the Greek, there are two words, *ouranos* and *epouranion*, from which the word *heaven* is most often derived. Most translations do not distinguish between these two words and consistently use the word *heaven*. However, the editors of the *Concordant Version* made a distinction between these words and concordantly translated them as *heaven* and *celestial*, respectively.

In the *Concordant Version*, the word *celestial* appears 19 times: John 3.12 (**Jesus telling of the celestial**); 1 Corinthians 15.40 (twice of **celestial bodies**); 1 Corinthians 15.48 (twice of **Christ the Celestial One** and **those who are celestials**), 49 (**wearing the image of the Celestial One**); Ephesians 1.3 (**every spiritual blessing among the celestials**), 20 Christ (**seated among the celestials**); 2.6 (**seats us together among the celestials**); 3.10 (**sovereignities and authorities among the celestials**); 6.12 (**spiritual forces of wickedness among the celestials**); Philippians 2.10 (**every knee bowing of the celestial**); 2 Timothy 4.18 (**celestial kingdom**); Hebrews 3.1 (**celestial calling**); 6.4 (**tasting the celestial gratuity**); 8.5 (**divine service of the celestials**); 9.23 (**celestial things**); 11.16 (**craving a better country, a celestial**); and 12.22 (**celestial Jerusalem**).

In the Greek, the word translated *celestial* is *epouranion*, which refers to that part of the universe that is on, or higher than. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* states that it refers to "above the sky; celestial, (in) heaven (-ly), high." Notice that the word *celestial* is used in the definition. The concordant method has chosen the word *celestial* to distinguish it from the word *heaven*, which comes from the Greek word *ouranos*. *Heaven* implies what is seen when looking up, and *celestial* implies what is beyond the heavens; thus, it is *higher than*. But what does this mean? Is it merely a place farther out in the universe, or is it something more than material matter or physical space?

It is probably a safe assumption that many think of the location of God's throne in terms of physical space; that is, they place God's throne some place in the far reaches of the universe or even outside of the universe. Some see it as in the far reaches of the north of the universe. Unfortunately, this comes from a lot of preaching on the subject of heaven that places heaven outside of time (eternity) and in another place in space. I have heard it stated many times by preachers that they are going to have these great big mansions to live in when they "get to heaven." I am often left with the impression that they think if they could travel to the far reaches of the universe, they would discover God sitting on a physical throne surrounded by a glorious orb of light. I guess this is where they expect to find those pearly gates, streets of gold, and mansions in the sky that many sing so fancifully about. But, is it correct to view God's throne as existing in the same dimension in which we live, only zillions of light years away? I doubt it!

Perhaps a better understanding of the celestials might bring some clarity to the subject. The *celestials*, especially the phrase *among the celestials*, most likely imply something far different from the physical universe that we see with our natural eyes and understand with our minds. Jesus spoke of the celestials, and Paul tells us that Christ and His body are among the celestials. New Jerusalem is celestial and so is the kingdom of God. Thus, we can conclude that the throne of God is celestial as well. Further, God is spirit and His realm is the spirit realm, so we could safely state that the celestial and the spirit realms are synonymous with God's realm.

Today, science states that we live in a space-time dimensional universe, or a "space-time continuum" comprised of three dimensions of space (i.e., height, width and depth, or longitude, latitude and

elevation, or the coordinates x, y and z), and one dimension of time. However, I submit that God and those among the celestials are in another dimension obviously not restricted by these dimensions. As one translation puts it, they are in the *heavenly* world.

The best indication that we are given as to the nature of the celestials is when Jesus appeared to His disciples after He was raised from among the dead. Mark records that the Lord Jesus appeared in a different form to two disciples while they were walking along on their way to the country (Mark 16.12). Luke records a more detailed incident as Jesus walked with two disciples on the road to Emmaus. **“But their eyes were prevented from seeing Him”** (Luke 24.16). It wasn't until they broke bread with Him that they recognized Him (Luke 24.31). Some might assume that somehow Jesus simply put some sort of veil over their sight, but if we combine this with what Mark recorded, it is obvious that they were prevented from seeing Him because He appeared in a different form. John records that the Lord appeared to His disciples in a room with shut doors (John 20.19). In other words, He simply appeared in their midst, not being restricted in any way by closed doors. After eight days, they were again in a locked room and He appeared in their midst (John 20.26). John records the third manifestation of the Master to His disciples as He stood on the beach and they were out in the sea fishing. **“But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know it was Jesus”** (John 21.4). Why did they not know it was their Lord? We might be tempted to think that they were too far from shore to recognize Him, but this cannot be the explanation. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, realized who it was and told Peter, **“It is the Lord”** (John 21.7). But a few verses later, it is recorded that **none of the disciples ventured to question Him, “Who are You?” knowing that it was the Lord** (John 21.12). This is a rather curious statement. They had seen Him twice before as He appeared in the room with closed doors. This time they knew it was Him because John sensed His presence, perhaps sensing the loving word of the Master, but it is obvious that they did not know Him by His appearance. Why? Because He appeared to them in a different form *again!*

So what are we to infer from the manifestations of the Lord Jesus to His disciples? He was not restricted by physical space (i.e., walls). He appeared and disappeared at will. When He did appear, He took on different forms, not necessarily the same one each time. In other words, the physical was not a hindrance to Him, and, in fact, He could alter His own appearance in the physical world. Could it be that our Lord Jesus was in some measure manifesting the celestial realm, at least how one who is *among the celestials* moves in and out of both realms, not hindered by the space-time continuum?

To add to this, consider the ministering spirits that render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation (Hebrews 1.14). We do not see with our physical eyes the good angels (spirit beings among the celestials) that might be ministering all around us, unless of course they choose to manifest themselves to us. Thus, the celestials must refer to something other than the space-time continuum in which mankind lives. It is the spirit realm, and our world is within it.

Now, here is the good news. According to Paul, God **rouses us together and seats us together among the celestials, in Christ Jesus, that, in the oncoming eons, He should be displaying the transcendent riches of His grace in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus** (Ephesians 2.6-7 CV). Another translation states that He **raised us with Him from the dead, and enthroned us with Him in the heavenly realms as being in Christ Jesus** (Ephesians 2.6 WNT). We are in Christ, and where He is, so are we. This is an objective truth. And in the oncoming eons, **we will be wearing the image of the Celestial** (1 Corinthians 15.49 CV). Those *in* Christ will be among the celestials. As space and time do not hinder the Celestial One, so space and time will not hinder the celestial ones in Christ, the sons of glory who will be manifested through the first resurrection. They too will be able to move between the celestial and the physical realms in the oncoming eons.

As I have stressed in the series on New Jerusalem, the celestial ones in Christ are the celestial Jerusalem, the body of Christ, the complement of Christ destined to sum up all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on earth (Ephesians 1:10) until, at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on the earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess (willingly) that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11). What a destiny!