

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)

#03-09109

New Jerusalem #19.

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Holy City, Coming Down Out of Heaven

(1) And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and the sea no longer is. (2) And I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, having been prepared as a bride, having been adorned for her Husband. (Revelation 21:1-2 LITV)

Many years ago, if you had asked me to describe New Jerusalem, I would have described this huge, mountainous city as large as half the United States descending out of heaven and settling on a new earth. I was not alone in this picture, for some biblical scholars have pictured it the same way. In fact, I have a book in my library by a well-known expositor of Scripture that has a sketch of New Jerusalem in it that looks like the Great Pyramid of Egypt, only it has a flat top with trees growing out the top. Over the years, I have seen similar depictions by others.

Of course, by now, you must realize that I don't see New Jerusalem in this light anymore. Frankly, it seems far-fetched to think of God's city as some huge structure of pure gold that just comes down out of heaven and plops itself on earth. The weight and the size of such a structure would be enormous, which makes me wonder if a new earth could even hold it without causing some imbalance in the earth's rotation or without the new earth being much larger than the present one; an idea some have suggested. Besides, do we honestly think that, after all these years, God is simply after a new mountain to sit on and for mankind to occupy and to visit? Are we to believe that God wants to be wed to a physical structure, a literal city? I don't think so! For this reason, we must see what New Jerusalem signifies, and when we do, we will see that it is about a people that are called a city, bride, and wife. This is what New Jerusalem is.

Now, as we continue to consider John's vision of New Jerusalem, we are told that it is **the holy city** (Revelation 21:2, 10). The word *holy* comes from the Greek word *hagios*, which is an adjective meaning "sacred, dedicated, set apart, holy." (a) of God, pure, implies distance between the Divine and the profane, John 17:11; (b) of things dedicated to God and His service, Ephesians 1:4; Matthew 24:15; (c) of persons dedicated to and thus partaking of the holiness of God, Romans 1:7; Mark 6:20" (Wigram's *New Englishman's Greek-English Concordance & Lexicon*). The last group (c) in this definition appears in Scripture as *saints*, which is translated from *hagios*.

We could say that New Jerusalem is the embodiment of the full definition of *hagios*. Nothing profane is part of the city nor will ever be part of the city, even allowed into it, for excluded are the **cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars** (Revelation 21:8, 27; 22:15). The city represents the **Presence and Essence** of God and, as such, is constituted only of that which is of God. As the holy city, New Jerusalem is the city of the Holy Spirit, for it is the very abode of God who is spirit, the whole of which is the tabernacle of God. But God is not alone, for He dwells among and in His conquering sons (Revelation 21:3, 7). The city is the manifestation of the sons of God, the saints, the holy ones, set apart unto God, not only to serve God but to serve all mankind (Revelation 21:24; 22:3-4). In one sense, the holy city is very exclusive since only that which is of the nature and character of the Son of God, the Alpha and the Omega, will ever be part of New Jerusalem. Yet, in another sense, the holy city is very inclusive since the Alpha and Omega will bring life to the rest of mankind (Revelation 21:6; 22:1-2). In other words, the city signifies the immortal, glorified, spiritualized Body of Christ that is filled with the fullness of God, fully conformed to the image of God's Son. This body will lead all mankind into the righteousness of God until all creation is brought into God's grand jubilee and no one is any longer outside the city of God, when all mankind is the holy city of God.

Now, John saw the holy city coming down out of heaven. Again, try to visualize the city as a literal city and your imagination might get stuck on pause. We might be tempted to think that the city is someplace way out in outer space being built by the angels. I once had a thought similar to this, only I saw God doing the building. To correct my faulty thinking, God gave me a vision of the one new man in Christ. Since this would be a diversion from the current discussion, I will explain this in another issue.

The phrase “out of” comes from the Greek word *ek*, which is “a primary preposition denoting origin; the point whence motion or action proceeds.” In other words, “out of” denotes the origin of the holy city. It is not that it comes down out of space or out of the sky; it comes down out of the heavenly or spirit realm, the abode of God. John saw the holy city materialize in the physical world. It was and is a picture of the spirit realm and the physical realm becoming one. If you want to be poetic, heaven and earth kissed. It was not only a picture of the kingdom of the heavens coming to earth but also of it enveloping or overtaking earth.

I realize that this may be a difficult concept to grasp, but God’s plan to achieve His purpose of being all in all is to bring heaven and earth together. We are given a glimpse of this by Paul.

(4) But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, (5) even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), (6) and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places [among the celestials] in Christ Jesus, (7) so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7 NASB [CV])

We are still on earth living in bodies of death, and yet, we are seated with Christ among the celestials. We have been joined with heaven, the very realm of God, not what we see when we look up into the sky at night. Because we are in Christ and seated with Christ, and we will receive immortal bodies of flesh and bones, we are destined to be of the spirit and physical realms. We will be constituted in such a way that we will be both heavenly and earthly. See the series #03-09177 through #02-09180, October 2009, *Flesh and Blood Shall Not Inherit the Kingdom*. In the next age, the world will see this in some measure, but it will not be until God’s Day, the age that follows, that the whole earth will see heaven and earth come together.

Think about it; the body of Christ, the body that is born from above, whose mother is the Jerusalem above (Galatians 4:26), is destined to be both heavenly and earthly. Our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), but our destiny is not heaven alone. Our destiny is heaven and earth, and our vocation for the next two ages will be to bring heaven to earth, not to escape it and leave it to figure out God’s plan and purpose on its own. I pray to God that this truth would sink into the heart of the church of our day that has everyone dying and, in an afterlife, either going to heaven or to hell for eternity. This is not the hope Jesus and the apostles have left us. Our hope is to become like the Son of God whose unfinished work is to sum up all things in the heavens and on the earth (Ephesians 1:10). Christ’s body is destined to be His complement in bringing about this summing up until all things have been subjected to Him so that God the Father may be all in all new (Ephesians 1:23; 1 Corinthians 15:25-28).

The psalmist says of the city of God: **“This one was born there”** (Psalm 87:6). We were born in the very heart of God, the architect of the holy city, and we are destined to be the holy city.

It is likely that there was a time when the physical universe did not exist; only the spirit realm existed. But a day came when God called forth Creation or the Universe out of Himself, and it became a physical manifestation of God Himself. It was not created out of nothing but out of the very life and essence of God. Putting sin aside, Creation was meant to be *heaven on earth*, or the spirit realm joined with the physical realm. This is what the new heaven, new earth, and New Jerusalem represent, only New Jerusalem represents God’s people fully in the image and likeness of His Son. When New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven, they will be heaven on earth as God always intended His creation to be.

Dear brethren, do you have a sense within you that this earth as it is today is not your home? Do you feel a tug of war going on in your inner man, as if you were made to be something other than what you are? Well, take heart; you were. You are seated **with Christ in Christ** and destined to bring heaven to earth for all mankind to enter into. Now, this is truly good news!