

009: Looking for a City

(based on Ch. 8 from *The End of the Pilgrimage*)

What do you know about the coming millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ?

- Those having a dispensational background would likely say it is a literal kingdom, on earth, ruled by Messiah that will last a thousand years (literally) and will be launched by Jesus after He returns the second time
- that is a good start
- but I have found in my preaching and teaching through the years that many Christians do not realize the coming kingdom has TWO realms, not merely one
- I would like to speak to that important aspect of the coming millennial kingdom in this study
- it is my understanding from the Scriptures that the millennial kingdom will have a heavenly realm and an earthly realm

I will describe what this is as we go along

- the other realm is planet Earth, which will undergo a few topological changes during the tribulation because of all the tectonic upheaval, but it is the same Earth as we know it, nonetheless
- granted, it will be a much better earth in many respects, because Jesus Christ will be the ultimate ruler, though it still will not be perfect
- and that is why He will rule with a rod of iron, so to speak
- I would like to focus most of this study on the heavenly realm of the coming kingdom

Heb. 11:10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

- the KJV says he “looked” for that city

- both translations are correct
- the idea is that Abraham was waiting with great expectation and anticipation for a city to be designed and constructed by God Himself
- We know he was not looking merely for Canaan, for Abraham actually made it to that Promised Land after leaving Ur and Haran. He lived there and saw it.
- So Canaan is not the city for which he was looking.
- **Heb. 11:13** These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

The common conclusion from these verses is that Abraham was looking for Heaven.

- But that is not entirely correct either.
- Abraham and others in the Old Testament were not merely looking for the third heaven, where God presently dwells
- nor were they looking for the eternal state to arrive
- Rather, they were looking for a city of reward, a place not on this earth, but a place closely connected with this earth, as we shall see.
- That is why Abraham lived in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise (Heb. 11:9).
- That is why they lived as strangers and pilgrims on Earth — because they did NOT see *this earth* as their home; they saw *that city* as their home.
- They were *persuaded* of the coming reward.
- They *embraced* it by faith.
- They *professed* that they were merely strangers and pilgrims on Earth.
- In other words, their lifestyle was entirely focused on the age to come, not the present age.

The same is said of Moses.

- **Heb. 11:26** esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.
- **Heb. 11:27** By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.
- Moses endured by fixing his eyes of faith on the invisible God.
- He looked to the reward.
- The verb *looked* in the Greek is the idea of looking away from all else and focusing intently on the one main thing.
- The word reward in the NKJV is actually translated as a phrase in the KJV, *recompense of reward*
- it is one Greek word and means “requital.”

Of course, requital is something given in return.

- Whether positive or negative reward, it is what the person earns.
- In other words, these patriarchs of Israel were not focused on the here and now; they were focused on a coming city.
- Indeed, they were focused on a city of reward — a city connected with requital or payout.
- It consumed their attention, for they wanted to qualify for that city of reward.
- Incidentally, the city of reward is only for the faithful, so these patriarchs sought to qualify for it;
- they looked away from everything else and gazed intently upon the prize.
- That is one way we know this city is NOT referring to the gift of eternal life and heaven in eternity
- God’s gift of eternal life is by grace through faith alone.

- There is no work involved for eternal life.
- But the city of reward is based entirely on one’s spiritual work for Christ – the believer’s walk of righteousness through dependence on God

Where is this city?

- It seems to be suspended above the earth, but visible to those on Earth, during the millennial kingdom.
- It will also be seen again in connection with the new Heaven and new Earth AFTER the millennial kingdom era
- But it is an actual, special city of reward that hovers over Earth.
- Now if that sounds far-fetched, just wait.
- I will demonstrate the point from the Scriptures, and I believe if we will connect the dots that God has given to us in His Word, the conclusion will be marvelous to comprehend!
- Indeed, I believe this is largely what God was speaking of when giving us the promise:

1 Cor. 2:9 *Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.*

- Notice the verse does not say, “The things which God has prepared for those who are *saved*.”
- It says, “for those that *love Him*.”
- It is a spectacular reward for faithfulness.
- In fact, the verse is a quote from an Old Testament Messianic kingdom prophecy, Isa. 64:4, which is followed by a verse that specifies the need to qualify
- I will read both verses
- **Isa. 64:4** For since the beginning of the world *men* have not heard nor perceived by the ear, nor has the eye seen

any God besides You, who acts for the one who waits for Him.

- **Isa. 64:5** You meet him who rejoices and does righteousness, *who* remembers You in Your ways.
- The city of reward is not for all saints.
- It is for those faithful saints whose works are righteous.
- Let me now give ...

Five Evidences of the city of reward

1. Jacob's dream

- **Gen. 28:12** Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder *was* set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.
- Abraham looked for the city of reward and although, presumably, he never saw it with physical eyes, he did view it with the spiritual eyes of faith.
- But Jacob is a different story.
- Do not jump to the conclusion that Jacob saw the third heaven, the place of God's dwelling.
- This word *heaven* is translated from the same Hebrew word as used in the Genesis creation account.
- **Gen. 1:1** In the beginning God created the **heavens** and the earth.
- And God called the firmament **heaven**. Gen. 1:8

The word *heaven* can refer to the sky, and that is how it is being used here in this verse.

- What does Jacob see?
- I would suggest he sees the city of reward, and I think that will become clearer as we go along.
- Specifically, he sees a *ladder* — that is, a staircase — ascending from Earth to this place in the sky.

- And he sees the angels (messengers) of God ascending and descending on it.
- Notice it does not say the angels are descending and ascending, which would be more the order we might expect. I believe the order is significant, and we will see why in a moment.
- Why does God allow Jacob to have this dream?
- We must remember the context.
- Jacob fled from home as a fugitive from his brother.
- Though Jacob had some spiritual weaknesses, that God worked on throughout the next few decades of Jacob's life, he was also a deeply spiritual man.
- He was focused on receiving the status of firstborn son — though he was the younger son — and receiving the blessing.

Jacob knew God had promised this to his parents, and he went after it, perhaps not in the best way, but he wanted it nonetheless, whereas Esau spurned it.

- That will factor into the end of our study.
- Jacob is now running away from home, with his parents' blessing, in order to escape the wrath of Esau and to find a wife from his extended family rather than amongst the ungodly Canaanites.
- God takes this opportunity to confer upon Jacob the patriarchal promises that had been made to his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham. (Listen to Gen. 28:13-15)
- **Gen. 28:13** And behold, the LORD stood above it (that's above the stairway) and said: "I *am* the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants.
- **Gen. 28:14** Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the

east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

- **Gen. 28:15** Behold, I *am* with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.”
- How encouraging! God promises His presence to Jacob and the fulfillment of the Messianic promises, saying, *In your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*
- That is a Messianic promise and a direct reference, not only to the Messianic sacrifice, but ultimately to the Messianic kingdom.
- Every nation will be blessed by that kingdom.
- So our first evidence testifying to the city of reward is Jacob’s dream.
- the second evidence is ...

2. Christ’s encouragement to Nathanael

- **John 1:47** Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!”
- **John 1:48** Nathanael said to Him, “How do You know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”
- **John 1:49** Nathanael answered and said to Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”
- **John 1:50** Jesus answered and said to him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.”
- **John 1:51** And He said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Why does Jesus make this promise to Nathanael?

- I believe there are two reasons.
- First, I think it is because of Nathanael’s declaration, *You art the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.*
- Nathanael instantly recognizes Jesus as the Messiah.
- The second reason is because of Jesus’ proclamation about Nathanael, *Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!*
- How often do we read Jesus making a proclamation of this nature in the Gospels?
- Hardly ever! I believe Jesus is saying this man is qualified for ruling with Christ in His Messianic kingdom because he is living righteously
- Then Jesus tells Nathanael what his eye has not seen, nor his ear heard, neither has entered into his heart — the things Jesus has prepared for him!

Hereafter you shall SEE heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man. John 1:51

- Remarkably, Jesus uses a different word for *SEE* than we might expect.
- It is not the normal word for viewing something with the eyes.
- This word *see* means “to gaze with wide open eyes, as at something remarkable” (Strong).
- This is a New Testament reference to the very thing Jacob had seen in the Old Testament — the city of reward in the coming Messianic kingdom, the place where saints who are faithful will rule and reign with Christ.
- Again, notice the angels are ascending and descending on the stairway to Heaven, not the other way around.
- Why is this? I believe these angels are not the heavenly beings created by God to do His bidding.

- I believe they are “angels” in the general sense of messengers, for that is what the word means in Greek

In this context, I believe they are faithful saints who will rule from the heavenly city of reward over the earth in the coming kingdom.

- If that is the case, then the reason for ascending, then descending, is because these messengers originate on Earth, not in Heaven.
- In my opinion, these are the faithful saints who will ascend up into the heavenly city of reward, where they will dwell, and that will be their headquarters for ruling over the earth.
- They will periodically descend to Earth with instructions for those living on Earth, and that will include those who are saved but deemed unfaithful to live in the city of reward.
- Notice on whom the faithful saints will ascend and descend — on the Son of Man, for He is the ultimate ruler, the King.
- The faithful saints will operate on His authority.
- He will “beam them up” to Heaven, so to speak, and then back down again to Earth to do His bidding.
- I suspect this is not an actual staircase, as we know it, but some otherwordly means of transportation to/from Earth.
- The third evidence of the city of reward is ...

3. The unique term used by Jesus to describe it

- Much ink has been used by commentators to describe the difference between the terms, *kingdom of heaven* and *kingdom of God*.
- I tend to think they are generally synonymous terms

- in fact, in Matt. 19:23-24 Jesus uses both terms in a synonymous manner
- **Matt. 19:23** Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.
- **Matt. 19:24** And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”
- both of these terms – kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God refer, not generally to the millennial kingdom ...
- but, specifically, to the ruling realm of the kingdom, the city of reward

Why does Jesus frequently use the term *kingdom of heaven*?

- that specific term is used 32X and exclusively in the Gospel of Matthew – why is that?
- We must remember that Matthew wrote his gospel to a Jewish audience, and his purpose was to emphasize Christ’s position as Messianic King.
- All the Jews were expecting Messiah to establish a kingdom on Earth.
- That had been prophesied in the Old Testament repeatedly.
- thus, Israel was expecting a literal, Messianic kingdom of God on Earth.
- Numerous Old Testament passages make that clear, but it is outside the scope of this study to explore those passages.

Why, then, the use of the term *kingdom of heaven*?

- Because, I believe, it emphasizes a certain REALM of the Messianic kingdom that Jesus was offering to the Jews — the kingdom of heaven.

- Unfortunately, the full meaning of the term does not come out in the English translation.
- Most literally, this phrase from the Greek translates, “the kingdom of the heavens.”
- That is abundantly clear in the original and implies that it is not merely a kingdom sent *from* Heaven
- It is a kingdom of the heavens, located *in* the heavens, but closely connected with Earth, as the ladder in Jacob’s dream and Jesus’ conversation with Nathanael suggests.
- Now I said earlier the Jews were expecting a literal, earthly Messianic kingdom,
- But what the Jews of Jesus’ day apparently did not understand was that there was a second aspect or realm of the Messianic kingdom — the city of reward component, or we could call it the heavenly component, the kingdom of the heavens.

Imagine an earthly Messianic kingdom with a heavenly city as headquarters.

- That city will apparently hover over the earth and be connected to the earth, at least in the sense that faithful citizens who dwell in the heavenly realm will have access back and forth.
- Presumably, those who dwell on Earth will not have access to the heavenly realm.
- I will illustrate that in a moment.
- Think of it! Jesus uses a special term and Matthew records it in his gospel to the Jews — describing one realm of the kingdom —
- the heavenly realm – the kingdom of the heavens, the kingdom of God –
- where the faithful saints will dwell and rule together with Christ.

- It is the castle, so to speak, the city of reward, and it is somehow suspended above Earth.

To enter that realm of the Messianic kingdom, one has to qualify by faithful service for Christ, and that includes obedience.

- All other saved people who have not lived in obedience and have not borne fruit will be consigned to the earthy realm of the kingdom and dwell there.
- But there is a vast difference between the two realms, as we shall see.
- You don’t want to settle for the earthly kingdom!
- Whenever we see the terms *kingdom of heaven* and *kingdom of God*, I think we should conclude that they are referring to heavenly realm of the Messianic kingdom — the city of reward
- By the way, when Jesus uses the term, *enter into the kingdom*, He is not talking about believing on Jesus for eternal life
- He is talking about qualifying to enter into the city of reward, the heavenly realm of the Messianic kingdom.
- We will explore this concept in more detail in a future study, God willing.
- We come now to our fourth evidence of this city of reward.

4. The warnings in the book of Hebrews not to squander our heavenly reward

- In essence, the warnings in the book of Hebrews caution believers about forfeiting an inheritance in the city of reward.
- We read earlier of Moses in Heb. 11, who *had respect unto the (recompense of) reward*.

- That is, he made decisions to leave the glories of Egypt and instead to suffer with the Israelites because he was determined to turn aside from all else and focus on the recompense, the payout of rewards.
- Like Abraham, he was looking for a city with foundations, whose builder and maker is God.
- He was focused on the heavenly realm of the kingdom.
- Is this something with which we need to be concerned?
- Absolutely, the book of Hebrews is probably the most grossly misinterpreted book of the Bible.
- But when understood from an inheritance/reward perspective, it makes perfect sense.

The book of Hebrews is not about persevering unto salvation (that is, eternal life).

- The salvation mentioned in Hebrews is not soteriological, referring to regeneration.
- It is referring to the sanctification aspect of salvation, or soul-salvation.
- Thus, the book is written to believers and focuses on persevering unto reward.
- At least five warnings are given, urging saints to persevere in their walk with the Lord, or else they could forfeit their inheritance.
- The showcase illustration referred to repeatedly in the book is that of Israel wandering in the wilderness.
- It is discussed extensively in chapters 3-4.
- Israel was saved at the Exodus and went out into the wilderness as redeemed people.

But they hardened their hearts against Moses and the Lord and rebelled.

- They became carnal and unbelieving, culminating at Kadesh-Barnea in the ultimate apostasy of not entering the Promised Land.
- As a result, God consigned them to wander in the wilderness, where they died.
- They never inherited the Promised Land, except for two faithful men and their families.
- The writer of Hebrews, on that basis, warns all saints to beware of the prospect of losing our reward and not inheriting the Promised Land — both now and in the coming kingdom.
- We go now to Heb. 12, which is the climax of the warnings.
- In 12:18-21 we are told that our inheritance is not Mt. Sinai, which was terrifying.
- Rather, starting in v. 22, our inheritance is Mt. Zion, which is magnificent and glorious.

Heb. 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,

- **Heb. 12:23** to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,
- **Heb. 12:24** to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel.
- Abraham was looking for a heavenly city, and so are we.
- It is called *heavenly Jerusalem* — a city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.
- Notice how it is described in v. 23.
- In this heavenly Jerusalem, which I would contend is the city of reward, there will be both faithful Jews and faithful Gentiles.

- That is why it is called a general assembly.
- And it seems to include angels, per v. 22.

But notice the additional description in v. 23:

- *To the church of the firstborn.*
- What is a church? It is a called-out assembly.
- Jesus is firstborn; He earned that title following His death, burial, resurrection and ascension.
- Furthermore, He wants us to earn that title.
- It's not automatic.
- According to Rom. 8:29, Jesus wants to be the firstborn among MANY brethren.
- All saints are children of God (heirs), but not all saints are firstborn sons (joint-heirs with Christ).
- The latter is an inheritance status that is conferred and results in reigning with Christ in the heavenly portion of his kingdom.

Here it is described as a city, heavenly Jerusalem, a called-out assembly of firstborn saints, which are written in Heaven.

- Yes, their names are in the book of life as saints, but further, their names are check-marked, so to speak, as qualifying saints, having earned the privilege of ruling with Christ.
- Notice also in v. 23, *the spirits of just men made perfect.*
- *Perfection* is not a justification term; it is a sanctification term.
- It is the idea of going all the way in discipleship — complete maturity in sanctification.
- So here is how I understand the last phrase of v. 23.
- The heavenly city of reward — heavenly Jerusalem — will be populated by those who are called out from among all saints at the Judgment Seat, for they are deemed worthy

of the status of firstborn son, a double inheritance, granting them the right to live in the heavenly Jerusalem and rule with Christ.

- They are the ones who are perfected in their sanctification process.
- Are you one of those?

Now the warning in Heb. 12:25, 28-29

- **Heb. 12:25** See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more *shall we not escape* if we turn away from Him who *speaks* from heaven,
- **Heb. 12:28** Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.
- **Heb. 12:29** For our God *is* a consuming fire.
- Do you see the point?
- You will not be part of the city of reward unless you qualify.
- So beware of disqualifying your-self!
- We come now to the fifth evidence of the city of reward.

5. The book of Revelation clearly describes it

- **Rev. 21:1** Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.
- **Rev. 21:2** Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
- **Rev. 21:3** And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God.

- **Rev. 21:4** And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”
- **Rev. 21:5** Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.”

The verses that follow (21:9-22:5), which I will not read, seem to give a greater description of the city of reward.

- Notice in v. 1 above that John sees a *new* Heaven and a *new* Earth and, in v. 2, a *new* Jerusalem.
- Since each of these three places is new, would it not imply that there is a former Heaven and a former Earth and a former Jerusalem coming down from God out of Heaven?
- Indeed. In fact, it seems the first Jerusalem comes down from Heaven in vs. 9-10:
- **Rev. 21:9** Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”
- **Rev. 21:10** And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,
- **Rev. 21:11** having the glory of God.

This, I believe, occurs at the beginning of the millennium and is the heavenly Jerusalem, the place we have referred to as the city of reward.

- It will hover over the earth and be connected by a stairway of sorts.
- Faithful saints will dwell there and rule with Christ from that place in the heavens.

- At the end of the millennium it appears the heavenly Jerusalem will ascend away from the existing Heaven and Earth and then descend again later to hover over the new Earth for the following age, which some call the eternal state
- Clarence Larkin called it the perfect age
- Though it is outside the scope of this study, the description of this city is magnificent.
- I would encourage you to read Rev. 21:9-22:5 and revel in *the things God has prepared for those who love Him*, 1 Cor. 2:9.
- This is truly a marvelous city of reward.
- Incidentally, v. 19 speaks of the *foundations* of the wall of the city.

What was Abraham looking for?

- A city with *foundations*, whose builder and maker (architect) is God.
- I believe this very city of reward that will hover over Earth in the millennium and then again during the perfect age is what Abraham was looking for — and we should be looking for it too!
- Are you looking for the city of reward?
- It is the kingdom of the heavens, the heavenly New Jerusalem.
- To conclude this study, let’s return to Heb. 12.
- I am going to read vs. 28-29 again
- **Heb. 12:28** Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.
- **Heb. 12:29** For our God *is* a consuming fire.

We are admonished: *Let us have grace.*

- In other words, don't spurn God's grace; accept it; embrace it; and thereby live the Christ-life of victory.
- If you do, you will inherit the heavenly city of reward; but if not, you will be like Esau.
- now listen to Heb. 12:14-17
- **Heb. 12:14** Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:
- **Heb. 12:15** looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;
- **Heb. 12:16** lest there *be* any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.
- **Heb. 12:17** For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

What a dreadful end to Esau's life.

- He forfeited his inheritance as firstborn son and lost the blessing too.
- Don't let Esau characterize your end.
- I challenge you to think on these things!