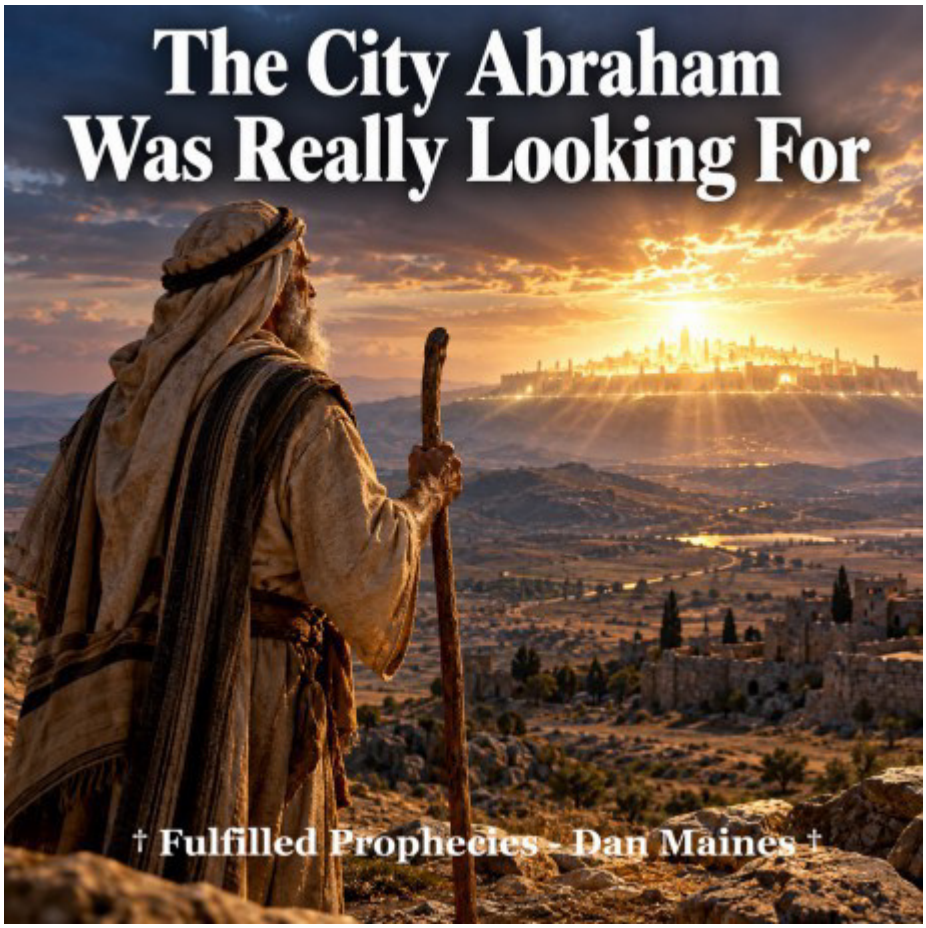
Fulfilled Prophecies

The City Abraham Was Really Looking For



By Dan Maines

The City Abraham Was Really Looking For

Introduction

† Abraham left his homeland because God promised him an inheritance, but was that inheritance ultimately a piece of land, an earthly city, or something far greater?

† Many Christians believe God's promises to Abraham still require a future restoration of national Israel and an earthly Jerusalem. However, the New Testament identifies the city Abraham was seeking, and it wasn't the earthly Jerusalem.

† Abraham lived in the promised land as a stranger because he

understood that God's ultimate promise extended beyond the land beneath his feet. He was looking for a city whose architect and builder is God (Hebrews 11:9-10).
† The writer of Hebrews didn't leave that city's identity unanswered. He told first-century believers that they had already come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God (Hebrews 12:22-24).
† The question isn't whether Abraham received a genuine promise concerning the land of Canaan. He did. The question is whether that land was the final destination of God's redemptive promise or a temporary inheritance pointing toward something greater (Genesis 17:8; Galatians 3:16).
† From Abraham's departure from Ur to the arrival of the New Jerusalem, Scripture reveals one continuous story of promise, fulfillment, and God's dwelling with His people (Revelation 21:2-3).

God Called Abraham Out Of His Homeland

Genesis 12:1-3
Now the LORD said to Abram, Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.
† God's promise began with a command to leave everything familiar and trust Him for an inheritance Abraham couldn't yet see (Hebrews 11:8).
† The promise included land, descendants, and blessing, but its ultimate purpose was never limited to one geographical territory. God intended to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham (Galatians 3:8).
† Paul identifies Christ as the promised descendant through whom God's covenant blessing reaches the nations. This means the Abrahamic promise finds its fulfillment in Christ

rather than in a future political kingdom (Galatians 3:16, 29).

Abraham Lived In The Promised Land As A Stranger

Hebrews 11:8-10
By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.
† Abraham entered the very land God had promised him, yet Hebrews says he continued living there as a stranger. His presence in Canaan didn't exhaust the meaning of God's promise (Acts 7:5).
† Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived in tents because their ultimate hope wasn't an earthly settlement. They were looking for something permanent that God Himself would establish (Hebrews 11:13-16).
† The city Abraham anticipated wasn't described as something constructed by human rulers, armies, or governments. Its architect and builder is God, identifying it as a divine inheritance rather than an earthly political capital (Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 21:2).
† Abraham's faith looked beyond the temporary arrangement of the land covenant toward the permanent dwelling place of God's redeemed people (Hebrews 13:14; Revelation 21:3).

The Patriarchs Desired A Better Country

Hebrews 11:13-16
All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been

thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.
† Hebrews explicitly identifies the country Abraham and the patriarchs desired as heavenly. That description rules out the idea that their ultimate hope was merely an earthly homeland (Philippians 3:20).
† They died in faith without receiving the complete fulfillment of the promises because the promised inheritance awaited the accomplishment of Christ's redemptive work (Hebrews 11:39-40).
† God had prepared a city for them. The emphasis is on God's completed provision, not a future city that human beings must construct in the Middle East (Revelation 21:2).
† The better country and the city prepared by God belong to the same heavenly inheritance that believers receive through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:22-24).
† The contrast is between the temporary earthly arrangement and the permanent heavenly reality, not between two competing geographical locations (2 Corinthians 4:18).

God Fulfilled The Earthly Land Promise

Joshua 21:43-45
So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand. Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.
† Scripture declares that God gave Israel the land He had promised their fathers. The land promise wasn't left unfulfilled for a generation thousands of years later (Nehemiah 9:7-8).
† Joshua states that none of God's good promises to Israel failed. This directly challenges the claim that the original land

promise remains unfulfilled today (1 Kings 8:56).
† The historical possession of Canaan was real, but it wasn't the final spiritual inheritance anticipated by Abraham. The temporary land arrangement pointed toward the greater rest and inheritance found in Christ (Hebrews 4:8-10).
† Israel's later disobedience and exile didn't erase God's earlier fulfillment. The prophets addressed Israel's covenant failures and restoration within the history of God's dealings with that nation (Nehemiah 9:26-31).
† The ultimate inheritance isn't obtained through national boundaries or political control. It's received through belonging to Christ, the promised descendant of Abraham (Galatians 3:29).

The Promise Was Fulfilled Through Christ

Galatians 3:16
Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, And to seeds, as referring to many, but rather to one, And to your seed, that is, Christ.
† Paul identifies Jesus Christ as the promised descendant of Abraham. The covenant promise reaches its intended fulfillment through Him (Acts 3:25-26).
† This means the fulfillment of Abraham's promise isn't dependent upon rebuilding an earthly temple, establishing another national kingdom, or restoring the old covenant system (Galatians 3:26-29).
† The promise wasn't abandoned or transferred to an unrelated people. It reached its intended destination in Christ, and everyone who belongs to Him shares in the promised inheritance (Romans 4:13-16).
† Abraham's family is ultimately identified through faith in Christ rather than physical descent alone (Galatians 3:7-9).

The Jerusalem Above Is Our Mother

Galatians 4:26
But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.

† Paul contrasts the earthly Jerusalem associated with slavery under the old covenant with the Jerusalem above, which represents the freedom of God's people in Christ (Galatians 4:24-25).
† The heavenly Jerusalem wasn't presented as another earthly capital awaiting construction. Paul identified it as the mother of those who belonged to the promise (Galatians 4:28, 31).
† The distinction is covenantal. The earthly Jerusalem represented the covenant that was passing away, while the Jerusalem above represented the freedom and inheritance established through Christ (2 Corinthians 3:6-11).
† This is why returning to an earthly Jerusalem as the center of God's redemptive program would reverse the direction of the New Testament's teaching (Hebrews 8:13).

Believers Had Already Come To The Heavenly Jerusalem

Hebrews 12:22-24
But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.
† This is one of the clearest statements in the entire New Testament concerning the city Abraham was seeking. The writer doesn't say believers will someday come to the heavenly Jerusalem. He says they had already come to it.
† The heavenly Jerusalem is identified as the city of the living God, directly connecting it with the city Abraham anticipated (Hebrews 11:10, 16).
† Believers had come to Mount Zion through their relationship with Jesus Christ, the mediator of the New Covenant. Their access wasn't dependent upon traveling to the geographical city of Jerusalem (Ephesians 2:18-22).
† The first-century believers were experiencing the arrival of the

promised heavenly reality while the old covenant system was approaching its final removal (Hebrews 8:13; 12:26-28).
† The heavenly city's fulfillment was being revealed through Christ and His covenant, not through a future national restoration thousands of years later (Revelation 21:9-10).

The First-Century Believers Were Seeking The Coming City

Hebrews 13:14
For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.
† The writer of Hebrews addressed believers living during the final generation of the old covenant age. The earthly Jerusalem wasn't their permanent city (Hebrews 8:13).
† The city they were seeking was the same heavenly city described earlier as the city of the living God (Hebrews 12:22).
† There's no contradiction between believers having already come to the heavenly Jerusalem and still seeking its full establishment. They had entered the New Covenant reality while awaiting the complete removal of the old covenant order (Hebrews 10:9, 37).
† Jesus had warned that Jerusalem and its temple would be destroyed within that generation. The earthly city was approaching judgment, while the heavenly kingdom couldn't be shaken (Matthew 24:1-2, 34; Hebrews 12:28).
† The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 publicly confirmed the end of the old covenant system and the permanent establishment of the New Covenant order (Luke 21:20-22).

The City Abraham Awaited Is The New Jerusalem

Revelation 21:2-3
And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will

be among them,
† John identifies the New Jerusalem as the holy city coming from God. Its heavenly origin agrees with the description of the city Abraham anticipated (Hebrews 11:10, 16).
† The city is also described as a bride, revealing that the vision concerns God's redeemed covenant people rather than merely physical buildings and streets (Revelation 21:9-10).
† The central promise is God's dwelling with His people. This is the goal toward which the entire biblical story of redemption was moving (Leviticus 26:11-12; 2 Corinthians 6:16).
† The New Jerusalem represents the completed New Covenant relationship established through Christ, with God's people enjoying direct access to Him (Ephesians 2:18).
† John was told that the prophetic events of Revelation were near and that the time was at hand. The fulfillment belongs to the first-century covenant transition rather than an event thousands of years beyond John's audience (Revelation 1:1-3; 22:6, 10).
† Abraham anticipated the city, the first-century believers had come to it, and Revelation revealed its completed covenantal establishment (Hebrews 11:10; 12:22).

The City Has No Earthly Temple

Revelation 21:22-23
I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.
† The New Jerusalem doesn't require a physical temple because God and the Lamb are its temple. The old covenant sanctuary has reached its fulfillment in Christ (John 2:19-21).
† This directly contradicts the expectation that God's ultimate purpose requires another earthly temple and a restored system of sacrifices (Hebrews 10:11-18).
† The city's light comes from God's glory and the Lamb. This prophetic imagery describes the spiritual reality of God's

presence rather than the disappearance of the physical sun and moon (Isaiah 60:19-20).
† God's people now worship through Jesus Christ, with access to the Father in one Spirit. The promise of divine fellowship isn't limited to a sacred geographical location (John 4:21-24; Ephesians 2:18).
† The city Abraham desired has everything the earthly sanctuary could only represent, God's permanent presence among His redeemed people (Revelation 21:3).

The Gates Of The City Remain Open

Revelation 22:14-17
Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star. The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let the one who hears say, Come. And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.
† The gates of the New Jerusalem remain open because the invitation to receive life in Christ continues (Revelation 21:25).
† The city isn't waiting to descend upon a future rebuilt earthly Jerusalem. It represents the New Covenant dwelling of God with His people, into which believers are welcomed through Christ (Hebrews 12:22-24).
† Those outside the city represent those who remain separated from its covenant blessings. The invitation to come and receive the water of life demonstrates that people can still enter through faith in Christ (John 4:14).
† The promise Abraham anticipated continues to bless people from every nation because the gospel remains open to everyone who believes (Galatians 3:8-9).
† We aren't waiting for God to establish another earthly capital.

We're proclaiming the kingdom Christ has already established and inviting others to enter its blessings (Colossians 1:13; Revelation 22:17).

Historical References

† Josephus, The Jewish War, Books 5-7, describes the Roman siege of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the devastation of the city in AD 70. His historical account confirms the destruction of the earthly Jerusalem and its sanctuary, the judgment Jesus had foretold (Luke 21:20-24).

† Tacitus, Histories 5.10-13, records the Roman campaign against Jerusalem and the conditions surrounding the city's siege. His testimony provides additional historical evidence for the first-century destruction of the Jewish capital (Matthew 24:1-2).

† Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.5, records the tradition that Christians in Jerusalem departed for Pella before the city's destruction. This account is consistent with Jesus' warning that His followers should flee when they recognized the approaching judgment (Luke 21:20-21).

† These historical writers confirm the destruction of earthly Jerusalem. Scripture establishes the theological meaning of that event as the final judgment upon the old covenant order (Hebrews 8:13; Luke 21:22).

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't need to travel to Jerusalem to enter the presence of God. Through Jesus Christ, believers have direct access to the Father in one Spirit (Ephesians 2:18).

† We aren't waiting for a future earthly temple, a restored Levitical priesthood, or another national kingdom. Jesus Christ has fulfilled the priesthood, the sacrifices, and the promises that pointed toward Him (Hebrews 7:23-28; 10:12-18).

† Our citizenship is in heaven, even while we continue living on earth. This describes our covenant relationship with Christ, not an expectation that the physical earth must disappear (Philippians 3:20; Ecclesiastes 1:4).

† We belong to the heavenly Jerusalem because we've been brought into the household of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:19-22).
† Abraham looked forward in faith to what God had promised. We look back upon Christ's completed redemptive work and live in the blessings of the kingdom He established (Colossians 1:12-14).
† The New Jerusalem isn't a distant destination we're waiting to see appear in the future. It's the covenantal reality of God's dwelling with His people through Jesus Christ (Revelation 21:2-3).
† The promise continues to reach the nations as people respond to the gospel and become children of Abraham through faith (Galatians 3:7-9, 29).
† Our responsibility isn't to wait for another prophetic fulfillment. It's to live faithfully in the kingdom we've received and proclaim the salvation already accomplished through Christ (Hebrews 12:28; Revelation 22:17).

Q & A Appendix

Q: Was Abraham ultimately waiting for an earthly city?
A: No. Although God promised Abraham the land of Canaan, Hebrews identifies his ultimate hope as a heavenly country and a city whose architect and builder is God (Hebrews 11:10, 16).

Q: Did God fulfill His promise to give Israel the land of Canaan?
A: Yes. Scripture explicitly states that God gave Israel the land He had promised and that none of His good promises failed (Joshua 21:43-45; 1 Kings 8:56).

Q: If Abraham died before receiving the promises, does that mean their fulfillment is still future?
A: No. Abraham and the other faithful patriarchs died before Christ accomplished the redemption toward which the promises pointed. Hebrews explains that their perfection was connected with the fulfillment God provided through Christ (Hebrews

11:39-40; 12:22-24).

Q: What city was Abraham looking for?
A: He was looking for the heavenly city prepared by God, identified in the New Testament as the heavenly Jerusalem and revealed in Revelation as the New Jerusalem (Hebrews 11:10, 16; 12:22; Revelation 21:2).

Q: Why did Hebrews say believers had already come to the heavenly Jerusalem?
A: Because through Jesus Christ they had entered the New Covenant relationship and gained access to God's presence. They weren't required to wait for another earthly kingdom to receive that blessing (Hebrews 12:22-24; Ephesians 2:18-22).

Q: Why does Hebrews 13:14 say believers were still seeking the city?
A: They had already entered the heavenly reality through Christ, but the old covenant order hadn't yet been completely removed. The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 marked the final removal of that temporary system (Hebrews 8:13; 12:26-28; 13:14).

Q: Does the New Jerusalem represent a literal city descending from the sky?
A: No. Revelation describes the city as the bride, the wife of the Lamb, showing its covenantal identity as God's redeemed people. Its heavenly origin identifies it as God's work rather than a human construction (Revelation 21:2, 9-10).

Q: Does this mean God rejected His promises to Israel?
A: No. God fulfilled His promises through Jesus Christ, Israel's promised Messiah. Everyone who belongs to Christ shares in Abraham's inheritance through faith (Romans 15:8; Galatians 3:16, 29).

Q: Are Christians living in the New Jerusalem today?
A: Yes. Believers belong to the heavenly Jerusalem through their relationship with Jesus Christ. The New Covenant provides the access to God and the spiritual blessings anticipated by Abraham (Hebrews 12:22-24; Revelation 21:3; Ephesians 2:18-22).

Q: What is the greatest lesson from Abraham's search for the city?
A: God's promises find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ, not in earthly buildings, political borders, or national governments. Abraham looked forward to God's permanent dwelling with His people, and believers now share in that inheritance through Christ (Hebrews 11:10, 16; Galatians 3:29; Revelation 21:3).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †
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Source Index
† Genesis 12:1-3; Hebrews 11:8-10; Hebrews 11:13-16; Joshua 21:43-45; Galatians 3:16; Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22-24; Hebrews 13:14; Revelation 21:2-3; Revelation 21:22-23; Revelation 22:14-17
† Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, Books 5-7; Tacitus, Histories 5.10-13; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.5

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