

# Jesus—Jacob’s ladder

By Tom Eads

## What is the greatest thing that you have ever seen, heard or learned?

- 1) Is it some spectacular view of nature?
- 2) Is it your child being born?
- 3) Does it involve someone famous, or a loved one?
- 4) Is it the words, “I love you”?
- 5) Was it a special day like a wedding, graduation, holiday or ceremony?

Text: John 1:43-51

When Nathanael declares, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.” [v. 49] he realizes:

- 1) Jesus is the Messiah that Philip spoke of, the one Moses and all the prophets wrote about
- 2) Jesus is God
- 3) God has cared enough about man to come to earth and keep all of His promises!
- 4) he is talking face to face with Messiah God, the long awaited one!
- 5) that God hears and responds to his deepest needs and to his sincere prayers
- 6) God has approved of him [“Here is a true Israelite...” v.47]
- 7) God knows him and cares for him

but Jesus said that Nathanael and all of us would see [and know] greater things than that!

## John 1:51

Literal Greek Translation (by TE—see Appendix 1):	NASB
You will see greater things.” <sup>51</sup> And he says to him, “Amen, Amen, I say to you all, you all will see heaven having been opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”	You will see greater things than these. <sup>51</sup> And He said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

### Explanation of the text:

#### **“You will see greater things.”**

(explain conversation between Jesus and Nathanael)

#### **“And he says to him, ...”**

Here Jesus is speaking to Nathanael. This falls on the heels of Jesus’ comment, “You will see greater things.”

#### **“Amen, Amen...”**

Gospel	Amen...	Amen, Amen...
Matthew	30	0
Mark	15	0
Luke	8	0
John	0	25

There is some speculation as to why John uses the double amen, while Matt/Mark/Luke use the single amen. But in both cases “Amen” precedes statements of great importance.

#### **“...I say to you all, you all will see...”**

Now Jesus directs his next statement to all of those present. They will all see...

### “...heaven having been opened...”

τον ουρανον is in the singular. ανεωγοτα is a perfect participle, indicating that once heaven is opened, it will continue to remain open.

Cannot refer to Jesus’ baptism: John the Baptist testifies in John 1:32-34 that this event has already happened. In Matthew and Mark, the baptism of Christ precedes the calling of His first disciples. The next day Jesus would perform His first miracle. (1:35; “Again the next day...” 1:43, “The next day...” 2:1; “On the third day...”)

Cannot refer to Jesus’ ascension: There were two ‘angels’ standing on the ground, while Jesus was so far up in the sky that a cloud had hid Him from their view (Acts 1:9-11). These two angels were certainly not ‘ascending and descending’ upon the Son of Man. Besides, there is no mention in the ascension that heaven was opened up.

Cannot refer simply to his upcoming miracles: many have interpreted “...heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” to mean that the disciples would see great miracles. Evidence in favor of this is that immediately John describes Jesus’ first miracle: the turning of the water into wine. Then Jesus performs many more miracles during His ministry. So then John 1:51 would be referring to the fact that the disciples would see His miracles, and it will be evident that heaven had opened up and God came to earth. The angels’ movements then show that Jesus had a special communication directly with the Father, and used the angels for His purposes.

*---certainly it is true that heaven had opened and God came to earth. And His miracles would testify to that fact. But the disciples would see much more than that. As Jesus would tell them more plainly later, “I AM the Way and the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father except through me.”*

### “...and the angels of God ascending and descending upon...”

After a short discussion with Nathanael, Jesus tells all of those present that they “shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on...” Now at this point, any Jew who knew the Torah very well would automatically be thinking about Jacob’s ladder. In Genesis 28:12 we read about Jacob’s dream of a ladder that was on the earth, with its top in heaven. The angels of God were *ascending and descending* upon this ladder. Jacob awoke and exclaimed that this was the gate of heaven (the way into heaven). He named the place *Bethel*, which means “house of God”. Now Jesus completes his sentence with ...the Son of Man.” Jesus IS Jacob’s ladder! He IS the gate to heaven! He IS the only way into heaven! Those present would surely see heaven having had been opened, for surely Heaven had come to earth when Jesus came. And His works (“greater things” in verse 50) would later testify to this fact. Jesus Christ is that ladder, that Way, into heaven. Every step of our life, every rung that we rest our foot upon, our only solid Rock and Foundation is our glorious Lord and Savior Jesus!

[see Genesis 28:10-18; Appendix 2]

### “.... The Son of Man.”

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
30	14	25	12

Now instead of finishing his sentence with “...Jacob’s ladder” He instead refers to Himself! But note this: He did not say, “...me.” or “...the Son of God.” Instead He finishes with “...the Son of Man” Here we see a grand statement of Deity (Heaven opened) tagged onto “the Son of Man.”

The disciples would see:

#1) That heaven had come to earth. God had come to dwell with us.

#2) That Jesus is the way into heaven. He is the Gate. *He is Jacob’s ladder.* There is

no other way into heaven, and every rung of the ladder is Jesus. The way into heaven is not a door marked 'Jesus' followed by a road marked 'works', but rather a ladder, the entirety of which is marked 'Jesus'.

#3) Jesus is both Man and God.

### Applications:

#### **The greatest thing you will ever see is not the miracles, but JESUS**

(A sign points to place. Miracles (signs) point to the Person of Christ)

#### **The Greatest thing we will ever see:**

Heaven's door is open to us right now, and Jesus is literally the stairway to and from heaven!

**1) This means:** You will never see even a glimpse of heaven if you do not believe that every step, every rung is Jesus, and that there is no hope for you and I apart from Jesus. That Jesus is the way into heaven. He is the Gate. *He is Jacob's ladder.* There is no other way into heaven, and every rung of the ladder is Jesus. The way into heaven is not a door marked 'Jesus' followed by a road marked 'works', but rather a ladder, the entirety of which is marked 'Jesus'.

If you are sitting here today and are harboring a notion in your mind that a really really good religious hindu, muslim, or other non-Christian will be in heaven, then you do not understand how man is saved from his sins, which means that you yourself are likely not saved.

What good would it do us if we knew what Nathanael knew [when he declared that Jesus was the King of Israel], and yet we didn't know how to be with God forever?

What good does it do a Christian to have met Jesus face to face, and yet have forgotten his first love?

**"If Christ has at any time been long out of our minds, we should rebuke ourselves.**

**There are some people who hope to be saved by Christ and to see his glory in another world but they are not concerned to meditate by faith on that glory in this world.** They are like Martha who was worried about many things and not like Mary who chose the better part, sitting at the feet of Christ (see Luke 10:38—42). **Let such be very careful lest they are not merely neglecting what they ought to do, but are actually despising it."**

—John Owen

**"If a person doesn't like to talk about Jesus, why would they want to go to Heaven?"-anonymous**

**2) This means** that no prayer reaches heaven and no blessing comes from heaven except through Jesus. The Bible says there is "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." [I Timothy 2:5]---Why do we try to attain our goals apart from Jesus? Why is it that it is easier for me to work my fingers to the bone all night preparing for a message like this, and yet it is so hard for me to pray for a half an hour straight about it? Don't I realize that no blessing comes into our lives that doesn't first come down the Ladder? Wouldn't I have greater success in my spiritual growth if I spent some more time calling on the Almighty Ladder?

**3) This means** that if you want hope and peace, you can only get it from Jesus. If you want to change, if you are not happy with your life, if you want a fresh start today--- your only hope is found in Jesus.

**You can see something greater than knowing that:**

- 1) Jesus is the King, the Son of God
- 2) Jesus knows the heart
- 3) Jesus hears prayer
- 4) Jesus cares for the individual

\*\*\*Wow! What could be greater than to see that the Son of God, the King, hears prayer, knows the heart, and cares for me, and knows me?

**You can see JESUS, and behold His Glory. You can see that He is the only Way to Heaven, and the only Way to peace and happiness, that HE IS!!**

**Conclusion:**

Jesus told his disciples ahead of time that they would see something greater than a man who knew the heart, heard the prayers, cared for the individual AND was among them. They would see something greater than the awesome fact that heaven had been opened! Something greater than knowing and seeing that God Himself had come to earth from heaven and was among them! They would see something greater than the powers of the Great Creator Himself being exercised as He changed the molecular content of liquids, replicated food, changed the surface tension of water, and raised the dead. They would see the elements, the wind and the waves obey the voice of their Creator. O yes! The disciples would see something greater than all this! They would see that this man, Jesus is THE WAY. Suppose they had witnessed all of these miracles, seen that heaven had opened, and met God, grew close to Him and learned of His intimacy. Suppose they had experienced all of this, yet in the end they never saw how they could get to heaven to be with God? What would all those experiences and knowledge amount to? But God came and said that they would see something greater than any vision, experience, or answer to prayer. They would see that Jesus is THE WAY, that He is Jacob's ladder, the literal gate, door, path, and road to heaven. They saw the greatest thing possible. And the greatest thing we will ever see is to see Jesus! Let us focus all of our sight, energy, and time on He who is all in all, Jesus!!!

John Owen put it this way, *"The Bible describes the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. His glory is far too great for our small minds to understand.... A continual view of the glory of Christ will have the blessed effect of changing us more and more into the likeness of Christ. Perhaps other ways and means have failed to make us Christ-like. Let us put this way to the test."*

**"If Christ has at any time been long out of our minds, we should rebuke ourselves.**

All our thoughts about Christ and his glory should be accompanied by admiration, adoration and thanksgiving.

There are some people who hope to be saved by Christ and to see his glory in another world but they are not concerned to meditate by faith on that glory in this world. They are like Martha who was worried about many things and not like Mary who chose the better part, sitting at the feet of Christ (see Luke 10:38—42). Let such be very careful lest they are not merely neglecting what they ought to do, but are actually despising it."

## Appendix 1:

**John 1:43-51** (translated by TE)

<sup>43</sup>The next day he decided to go forth into Galilee, and he finds Philip. And Jesus says to him, "Follow me." <sup>44</sup>Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. <sup>45</sup>Philip finds Nathanael and he says to him, "The One Moses wrote of in the Law, and the Prophets we have found, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." <sup>46</sup>And Nathanael says to him, "Is it possible for a certain good one to be from Nazareth?" Philip says to him, "Come and behold!" <sup>47</sup>Jesus beheld Nathanael coming to him and he says concerning him, "Behold! Truly an Israelite, in whom there is no insincerity!" <sup>48</sup>Nathanael says to him, "In what way did you know me?" Jesus answered and says to him, "Before Philip called you, I beheld you being under the fig tree." <sup>49</sup>Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel." <sup>50</sup>Jesus answered and saying to him, "Because I tell you that I beheld you underneath the fig tree, you believe. You will see greater things." <sup>51</sup>And he says to him, "Amen, Amen, I say to you all, you all will see heaven having been opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

## Appendix 2:

**Genesis 28: 10-18** (NASB)

<sup>10</sup> Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. <sup>11</sup> And he came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place. <sup>12</sup> And he had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. <sup>13</sup> And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants." <sup>14</sup> "Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed." <sup>15</sup> "And 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 promised you." <sup>16</sup> Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." <sup>17</sup> And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." <sup>18</sup> So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on its top.