

The Gates of Jerusalem and Christ

Dear Reader,

What follows is a compilation of my sermon notes from a series of teachings given at The Sanctuary Foursquare Church during the months of September and October 1998. While in the middle of an enormous physical building ministry in our church God revealed His design for a *spiritual* building ministry that would actuate His ultimate purposes for our church community. Desiring revelation from God's word for our church during such a challenging season, led by the Holy Spirit I found myself in the book of Nehemiah and specifically focused on the rebuilding of the gates of Jerusalem following the return of the exiles from Babylon. What seemed painfully obvious (teaching about the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem during a contemporary church building ministry) became a profound encounter with Jesus Christ and God's plan of redemption through Him.

Each of the gates in the city of Jerusalem represents an aspect of God's character and design for us that can be applied whether or not we're involved in a church building ministry. From the first gate, the Sheep Gate, which so simply represents the need for salvation through the Lamb of God, to the final gate, the Inspection Gate, which declares the coming day of judgment where all mankind will be inspected by a Holy God, we see Jesus—and we see where we are needful of His touch in our life.

As you study these notes, continually ask the Holy Spirit to reveal which gate needs “repair” in your life and how this must take place. Many in our congregation realized they didn't even have a “Sheep Gate” in their life and consequently gave their life to Christ. Others realized the need to “repair” the Fountain Gate in their life and received the fullness of God's Spirit, or to attend to the Refuse Gate and dedicate themselves to a life of purity.

Whatever gate needs repair in your life, God stands ready to respond with grace and power to the humble that admit their need and seek Him for answers.

To the extent that you share this information with others make sure it has first taken root in your life, for we live in a culture that encourages instruction without personal revelation. Therefore we must remember a key value of God's word: it is a lamp unto *our* feet (showing us where *we* are) and a light unto *our* path (showing us where *we* should be). To whatever degree my sermon notes help you in this process and bring you closer to Jesus Christ, **To Him** goes all the glory!

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The Gates of Jerusalem—Christ in the Midst of Them

(All Scripture references in New Living Translation unless otherwise noted)

Like Nehemiah and many others in the Bible we face a building project with ramifications beyond the physical. On a divinely instituted path we walk out the plans of God that promise character development and spiritual revival and in our choosing to obey we will see the hand of God on our lives.

History

To understand Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the walls and gates of Jerusalem one must understand the history behind it and the heart of God in it. After centuries of turmoil and rebellion in Israel God fulfilled the prophecies of Leviticus 26:14-46 and Jeremiah 25:2-14 by allowing the then world superpower, the Assyrians, to assail the northern tribes of Israel in 722 B.C. and scatter the survivors of the conquest throughout the land.¹ Then the Babylonians defeat the Assyrians (605-586 B.C.), and as the new world superpower is allowed by God to assault the southern tribes of Judah, destroy Jerusalem, and take the remaining survivors into captivity for 70 years in Babylon.

During the 70 years of Babylonian exile the power balance in the world shifts once more toward the Persians who defeat the Babylonians in 539 B.C. One year later God moves upon the heart of King Cyrus of Persia and he establishes a decree that the Jews should be allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple and restore their national calendar of feasts and festivals. God then moves upon the heart of the priests, Levites and leaders of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin to rebuild the temple of the Lord.²

This return to Jerusalem ("foundation of peace") was significant, as it fulfilled the prophecies concerning the "2nd temple"--the temple in which the Messiah would establish His kingdom.³ It was also significant in that Jerusalem was viewed as the center of the Jewish faith and therefore the Jewish nation's seat of power. For any conquered people to be allowed to rebuild their seat of power was unheard of, yet God was in control. Jerusalem to this day holds a place no other city holds on earth or in the eyes of God. Jerusalem is the world's most important city as it has claims upon it as the center of the world's three major religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam). There is no city in the world with such a distinction. According to the Bible, Jerusalem was a city like no other in the sight of God,⁴ the dwelling place of God,⁵ the Holy City,⁶ the throne of God,⁷ the Holy Mountain,⁸ the city of Truth,⁹ the city of the Great King,¹⁰ the city of Christ's death and resurrection,¹¹ the city of Christ's return,¹² and the center of Christ's new kingdom.¹³ Indeed there is no city like Jerusalem, and Nehemiah knew this--like Jesus centuries later, Nehemiah wept over the city of Jerusalem.¹⁴

¹ II Kings 17:5-6

² Ezra 1:1-4

³ Zechariah 9:9

⁴ Psalm 87:2-5

⁵ Psalm 46:4, I Kings 8:13

⁶ Nehemiah 11:1, Isaiah 1:26, 48:2, 52:1, Matthew 4:5

⁷ Jeremiah 3:17

⁸ Daniel 9:16

⁹ Zechariah 8:3

¹⁰ Psalm 48:2

¹¹ Luke 22-24

¹² Zechariah 14:5

¹³ Isaiah 33:5, Revelation 21-22

¹⁴ Nehemiah 1:4, Matthew 23:37-39

But before Nehemiah, two other returns to Jerusalem took place as a result of King Cyrus' decree. The first return was led by Zerubbabel and Sheshbazzar in 637 B.C., the second was led by Ezra in 458 B.C. and Nehemiah was granted permission to return between 445-448 B.C., both decreed by King Artaxerxes of Persia. In each return there was a unique purpose:

- Σ **First Return:** Zerubbabel to restore the physical temple
- Σ **Second Return:** Ezra to restore the spiritual temple
- Σ **Third Return:** Nehemiah to restore the union between the physical and spiritual temples

It is a mistake to always assume something physical is not therefore spiritual. The rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem took hard work, materials, money, scheduling, sacrifice and human determination. While God cannot be confined within the four walls of a man-made structure He can choose to dwell in such a place and as a result the people of God must comply with His directives. We face a similar predicament in that God has instructed us to occupy a physical property and dedicate it as a sanctuary (dwelling place of God), and we could be tempted to dismiss the physical construction of our new church home as merely the results of Americanized Christianity (i.e., we must have a building to meet in) or shelve it in our hearts as a way of subtle protest against the work. The early disciples of Jesus learned that that which often seems human is in fact very divine:

"During supper, a woman came in with a beautiful jar of expensive perfume and poured it over Jesus' head. The disciples were indignant when they saw this. 'What a waste of money,' they said. 'She could have given the money to the poor.' But Jesus replied, 'Why berate her for doing such a good thing to me? You will always have the poor among you, but I will not be here much longer. She has poured this perfume on me to prepare my body for burial.'" ¹⁵

I must confess that had I been there at that moment I also would have been one of the critics who saw things only in the physical. We often see only with our physical eyes and miss the profound nature of God in the most ordinary of circumstances. Our history as a church, like that of God's people throughout all history, is wrought with divine appointments and assignments, and because it is our desire NOT to give place to Americanized Christianity we need not fear the physical nature of our assignment from the Lord. God is building a community to reach a community and He is using both physical and spiritual means to accomplish this goal.

Just as **Zerubbabel** was called of God to rebuild a physical temple, God called us in 1989 to rebuild the physical church at our former "north campus." And just as **Ezra** was called by God to rebuild the spiritual temple by reinstituting the covenants of God, we've spent years tearing down the false idols of Americanized Christianity and restoring the purity of God's Word to His people. And like **Nehemiah**, we are being called to combine the two that a community of believers would develop—a people empowered by the Spirit of God who have worked and laughed and cried together side-by-side, a people who have shared meals together, prayed together and played together, a people who have rejected defining church as "Sunday meetings" and who have come to understand the sovereignty of God in all things physical and spiritual.

26444 Friendly Valley Parkway is our opportunity to become a community of believers and not merely a gathering of people fulfilling religious duties. God has graciously granted this opportunity and we would be foolish to miss it. There is no way we would have or could have done what has been accomplished so far if man were in charge or if Vision 2000 was simply a man-made idea. God is more in control than we realize; we need only to ask for His eyes, ears, heart and hands to be ours. So we follow Nehemiah and

¹⁵ Matthew 26:7-12

observe as he hears from God, moves boldly in faith to accomplish the physical task that will bring a spiritual revival, and rejoice that God has seen fit to allow us to follow a similar path.

Nehemiah

Nehemiah (Heb. "Jehovah comforts") represents a forerunner of the work of the Holy Spirit—that which brings repentance, reform, restoration, renewal and revival. (As you progress through this teaching, note there is no record of Nehemiah putting his hand to any of the work on the gates—this is the symbolism of the Holy Spirit working *through us* to accomplish the will of God!)¹⁶ A Jewish patriot and cupbearer for King Artaxerxes Longimanus of Persia, (464-424 B.C.), Nehemiah held a position of high prominence and importance in the kingdom of Persia. As the cupbearer for the king, Nehemiah had to be a person of incredible loyalty and integrity as he was intimately involved with the King and Queen, serving them their personal meals and protecting them from sabotage (i.e. thwarting any attempt to poison the royal family). And since Artaxerxes' father, the previous king, had been murdered in a revolt, Nehemiah's position and the King's need for a man of integrity was that much more crucial.

THEME 1: DEDICATION TO GOD

*"I once thought all these things (career, reputation, family ties, material things) were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ and become one with Him."*¹⁷

Nehemiah was also from a prominent Jewish family. His brother Hanani was a spokesman of an official delegation from Susa (the winter residence of Persian kings) which informed Nehemiah of the ruin of the city of Jerusalem in either late 446 B.C. or 444 B.C. (theologians are not sure about the exact date), and Hanani later became a governor of Jerusalem as did Nehemiah (two non-consecutive terms). The fact that Nehemiah and his father Hacaliah's names contained the suffix *yah* most likely indicates they were loyal to the Jewish orthodox faith and therefore highly respected among the people. While there remains debate among scholars it was also possible that Nehemiah was a eunuch, as the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) describes Nehemiah as such (it was traditional at the time for cupbearers and other such servants to be eunuchs) and there is no mention of Nehemiah being married. Regardless, while Nehemiah was set apart in the kingdom of Artaxerxes he was also set apart in the kingdom of God and was used by God to rescue Israel from complete destruction—and so should we be as set apart for undivided and faithful service to our King, Jesus Christ.

THEME 2: PRAYER

*"The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results. Elijah was a human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for the next three and a half years! Then he prayed for rain, and down it poured! The grass turned green and the crops began to grow again."*¹⁸

¹⁶ The "Nehemiah" in Nehemiah 3:16 who does physically work on the walls of Jerusalem refers to a different person. Notice the Nehemiah of this verse has a father named Azbuk, while the father of Nehemiah who oversaw the rebuilding of the walls and gates of Jerusalem is named Hacaliah. (cf. Nehemiah 1:1)

¹⁷ Philippians 3:7-9a

¹⁸ James 5:16b-18

Upon hearing of the destruction of Jerusalem, Nehemiah wept, mourned, fasted, and prayed to God. He confessed his own failures and that of his family's to uphold the laws of God and begged God for mercy. He asked God to give him favor with the king, for permission to be granted to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. King Artaxerxes gave the permission and armed with official royal papers that afforded him safe passage as well as the rights to materials and supplies necessary for the journey and project Nehemiah ventured to Jerusalem in the spring of either 445 B.C. or 444 B.C. Each time Nehemiah faced opposition he responded in seeking the will of God, and so should we petition our Father in heaven when we have needs.

THEME 3: DIVINE ASSIGNMENTS ARE ALMOST ALWAYS OPPOSED

*"Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad--because these trials will make you partners with Christ in his suffering, and afterward you will have the wonderful joy of sharing his glory when it is displayed to all the world. Be happy if you are insulted for being a Christian, for then the glorious Spirit of God will come upon you."*¹⁹

In setting about the rebuilding of the walls and gates of the city Nehemiah was opposed from the beginning by such men as Sanballat (the governor of Samaria), Tobiah (the governor of Ammon) and Geshem (the governor of Dedan), each of whom claimed the rebuilding of Jerusalem would incite another rebellion by the Jews and would disrupt the economic and political stability of their respective jurisdictions. These attacks came in the form of ridicule,²⁰ force,²¹ discouragement,²² fear,²³ selfishness,²⁴ guile,²⁵ slander,²⁶ and threats.²⁷ Nehemiah generally ignored the insults and threats, although he remained vigilant in his protection of the project and always responded with prayer, persistence and vigilance.²⁸ The accusers even attempted to lure Nehemiah away from the project,²⁹ and to convict him of treason,³⁰ but both attempts failed. Satan need only be concerned with those who are a threat to him, and those who truly follow Christ are a threat to him and are therefore often opposed by the world and the forces of darkness. If we find no opposition in our life we are probably not preaching and practicing the gospel of Jesus Christ, for He is a rock of offense and stumbling block to the disobedient.³¹ While no weapon formed against us will prosper,³² the attacks will come against those who follow God's ways!

THEME 4: PEOPLE ARE PEOPLE

*"No one is good, none even one. No one has real understanding; no one is seeking God. All have turned away from God; all have gone wrong. No one does good, not even one."*³³

¹⁹ I Peter 4:12-14

²⁰ Nehemiah 4:1-6

²¹ Nehemiah 4:7-9

²² Nehemiah 4:10

²³ Nehemiah 4:11-23

²⁴ Nehemiah 5 (all)

²⁵ Nehemiah 6:1-4

²⁶ Nehemiah 6:5-9

²⁷ Nehemiah 6:10-19

²⁸ Nehemiah 4:4-9

²⁹ Nehemiah 6:2

³⁰ Nehemiah 6:6

³¹ I Peter 2:8

³² Isaiah 54:17

³³ Romans 3:10b-12 as quoting Psalms 14:1-3 and 53:1-3

The origin of the opposition to Nehemiah's work was not only external but also internal. The Jews themselves confronted him with many problems that required great diplomacy and firmness on the part of Nehemiah, the people of Judah threatened to defect from the project because they believed they were overworked, and the constant drone of outside opposition caused distress and weariness internally among the workers. So in addition to rebuilding the walls of the city Nehemiah was forced to deal with a tremendous amount of "people problems," and this is true of anything where imperfect people are called upon to complete a divinely perfect assignment, and where servants of the Lord are divinely called upon to lead God's people from convenience to covenant (e.g. Moses, Joshua, Paul, Jesus and even your pastor!).

THEME 5: GOD IS GOD

*"And we know God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them. For God knew His people in advance, and He chose them to become like His Son, so that His Son would be the firstborn, with many brothers and sisters. And having chosen them, He called them to come to Him. And He gave them right standing with Himself, and He promised them His glory. What can we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?"*³⁴

Yet due to God's hand upon him, and his prayerful determination and wisdom, Nehemiah triumphed and restored the walls and gates of Jerusalem sufficiently to allow people to experience a *spiritual* rebuilding. While the dedication of the completed city wall was attended with great joy and celebration Ezra's ensuing proclamation of the laws and covenants of God that had for so long been neglected brought tremendous grief--the spiritual rebuilding had kicked into high gear! In their remorse for the general failure to know and heed God's word the people are encouraged by Nehemiah and Ezra to rejoice, for "...the joy of the Lord is your strength!"³⁵ Nehemiah knew that what was at work was holy and established by God, and that the revelation of national sin would bring about repentance, reform, and renewal. God's word continued to be proclaimed in many prolonged and sober gatherings, and the knowledge and authority of God was quickly revived. Appropriate temple worship was restored and in his final actions Nehemiah sought for the purity of Israel by exposing national idolatry and wickedness and making the necessary reforms to insure a continuation of righteous service to God from generation to generation. God promised through the prophet Jeremiah that a remnant of Israel would return to build the temple, and it happened just as God promised.³⁶ No man, power or principality can thwart the ultimate completion of God's purposes.

Nehemiah was a man of uncompromising devotion to God, unwavering commitment to God's ways, and an unbending will to get a job done. God used Nehemiah to rebuild not only the walls of the city of God, but the lives of the people of God...and this is God's plan for us today. In Nehemiah chapters 7-13 we have the account of the reviving of the people of God which began with a census to see who was part of the remnant and continued with the word of God being proclaimed with boldness, the nation's sins being confessed, a holy covenant agreed upon by the people, occupation of the restored city of Jerusalem, and the nation's sins cleansed.

³⁴ Romans 8:28-31

³⁵ Nehemiah 8:10

³⁶ Jeremiah 25:12-14 and 29:10-14

Our Connection to Nehemiah

We face a similar situation as Nehemiah. We live in a culture that has eroded the walls and gates of the Church in America. Many Americanized Christians long ago neglected the covenants of God in favor of "intermarrying" with the secular world, becoming bi-spiritual (part world, part religious), and the weight of this idolatry has destroyed the very environs intended by God to provide peace and safety. We are in captive exile and some of us don't even realize it. We've become accustomed to being slaves in service to foreign kings and have forgotten and neglected the Word of God. Yet in His mercy God has brought us to a time and place that not only will provide us a new home but also will in the process expose our needs and give us opportunity to rejoice because the joy of the Lord is still our strength!

Like Nehemiah, those close to God weep at the condition of God's people and resolve to do something about it. From a broken heart they become people of prayer, faith, boldness and determination. Those who understand God's heart regarding our new church home mourn as our homes are arrayed in splendor while His remains uninhabitable. And like Nehemiah those who determine to get involved will face opposition from the enemy. There will be the Sanballats, Tobiahs and Geshems that ridicule, mock and accuse. There will be those who in their weariness will defect from the ranks. There will be those whose focus leaves the rebuilding of walls and gates and falls upon the opposition, resulting in fear and distress. There will be those, internally and externally, who decide they are above the call of God.

Yet there will also be those who in their concern for God's house rise up and build. There will be those who carry a weapon of warfare in one hand and a building tool in the other as they attend to the walls and gates in their lives and in our church. There will be those who recognize their distance from God and in repentance find the awesome grace God affords the humble. And because it is God's plan, these walls and gates will be rebuilt!

And like those in the time of Nehemiah, we are experiencing spiritual renewal and revival, having similarly walked the path of establishing a census to see who is part of the remnant from the time of captivity at the "north campus," the word of God being proclaimed with boldness, the church's sins being confessed, a holy covenant agreed upon by the remnant (i.e. we will go forth in faith and build!), and soon the occupation of our new church home and the past sins of the church cleansed from our midst!

So let us look again at Nehemiah's building project to find the path God intends for *our* spiritual renewal.

The Gates

In the Bible *gates* represent many things. Gates were the civic centers of the city, since the city dwellers worked on farms outside the city walls and everyone passed through the gates on a daily basis. It was there, in an open square by the gate, that people met their friends or discussed news.³⁷ Elders of the city sat in the gates to administer judicial matters.³⁸ Kings sat at the gates to meet with their subjects and also to adjudicate matters.³⁹ In fact the first legal transaction recorded in the Bible is that of Abraham's purchase of the cave of Machpelah as a burial place for Sarah and this occurred at the gate of the city.⁴⁰

³⁷ Genesis 19:1; 23:10; 34:20; II Samuel 15:2; Nehemiah 8:1; Psalm 69:2

³⁸ Deuteronomy 21:19; Joshua 20:4; Ruth 4:1

³⁹ II Samuel 19:8; I Kings 22:10; Jer. 38:7; II Chronicles 32:6

⁴⁰ Genesis 23:10, 18

Priests and prophets often delivered their messages in the gates.⁴¹ Criminals were punished outside the city gates,⁴² and the gates were also the market places of the town.⁴³

There is also the symbolic use of the term *gate* in the Bible. It often referred to the city itself noting the fact that the gates were the weakest points of defense; therefore if the gates were conquered the whole city would succumb.⁴⁴ To “sit among the elders of the gates” was to be in a place of high honor⁴⁵ and “oppression in the gates” referred to judicial corruption.⁴⁶ The gate is also a symbol of strength, power and dominion.⁴⁷ Gates were pictured as “howling,” “lamenting,” and “mourning” in a time of a city’s demise.⁴⁸ The Bible mentions the gates of Heaven,⁴⁹ of the Lord,⁵⁰ of Sheol,⁵¹ of death,⁵² and of Hades.⁵³ When Jesus contrasted the wide and narrow gates of heaven and hell He was figuratively referring to the largest gate of the city which permitted hundreds to pass through at any given time and the smallest gate which only allowed a single person or animal to pass through at a time.⁵⁴

The gates of the city, above all things, represent and define the community. These ancient "gates" have relevance to us today. God is defining and releasing a sense of community among us and each gate we study represents an important component of our life in Christ and an opportunity to further the cause of "building a community to reach a community."

In total there were ten gates attended to in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem by Nehemiah, and the study of this history will expose places of vulnerability in which God desires restoration and areas of strength in which we can rejoice. If we are diligent to find and walk in the covenant of God’s Word we *will* become a true community of believers. And because our mandate from the Lord is clear our attentiveness to His word is even more important. Let us venture forth like Nehemiah and attend to these gates and watch as God builds a city on a hill whose light penetrates the darkness.

Rebuilding the Gates of Jerusalem and its Application Today

The rebuilding of the gates of Jerusalem symbolized a work of the Holy Spirit that prepared people for a renewed encounter with God and His covenants. Without the rebuilding of the gates there could have been no safe place for the people to gather as God's people, to grow in the truth of God’s Word and therefore no hope of going beyond the impotence of neglected covenants. Each gate had its place, purpose and importance in the overall picture, and any one gate left undone would leave the city vulnerable to hostile siege from outside forces. The ten gates rebuilt through the oversight of Nehemiah were:

⁴¹ II Kings 7:1; Nehemiah 8:1, 3; Jeremiah 17:19, 20; 36:10

⁴² I Kings 22:10; Acts 7:58

⁴³ II Kings 7:1

⁴⁴ Genesis 22:17; 24:60

⁴⁵ Proverbs 31:23

⁴⁶ Job 31:21; Proverbs 22:22

⁴⁷ Psalms 24:7; 87:2; Isaiah 60:18

⁴⁸ Isaiah 3:26; 14:31; Jeremiah 14:2

⁴⁹ Genesis 28:17

⁵⁰ Psalm 118:20

⁵¹ Isaiah 38:10

⁵² Psalm 9:13

⁵³ Matthew 16:18

⁵⁴ The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible. The Zondervan Corporation. 1975. Volume Two. Pages 655-656

1. The Sheep Gate

(Also known as the Benjamin Gate or Gate of the Flock)

2. The Fish Gate

3. The Old City Gate

(Also known as the Middle Gate, the Ephraim Gate, the Mishneh Gate or Jeshanah Gate)

4. The Valley Gate

5. The Refuse Gate

(Also known as the Dung Gate or Potsherd Gate)

6. The Fountain Gate

(Also known as the Gate between Two Walls)

7. The Water Gate

8. The Horse Gate

(Also known as the Foundation Gate or Sur Gate)

9. The East Gate

(Also known as the Beautiful Gate or Kings Gate)

10. The Inspection Gate

(Also known as the Miphkad Gate, Muster Gate or Gate of The Guard)

There is some debate as to the exact position and name of some of the gates. Two other gates in the city of Jerusalem are mentioned in Scripture (the *Corner Gate* in II Kings 14:3; II Chron. 26:9; Zechariah 14:10 and the *First Gate* in Zechariah 14:10), yet neither of these is referred to in Nehemiah's account of the rebuilding of the walls. It is possible they are synonymous with one of the other gates named or were eliminated during the rebuilding process. So we will study these ten gates according to Nehemiah's account and trust God to bring understanding as to how each of these gates relates to us and our current season of physical and spiritual "remodeling."

The Sheep Gate

(Salvation in Christ, Worshiping God) ⁵⁵

Nehemiah begins the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem at the Sheep Gate and moves in a counter-clockwise direction around the entire perimeter. Located in the northeast corner of the city wall, the Sheep Gate was the place closest to the Temple where herdsmen brought sheep into the city for sacrifice in the temple, and it was here that Eliashib the high priest along with the other priests of the temple became the first to join forces with Nehemiah and rebuild the Sheep Gate. The symbolism of this first gate is profound. It's no coincidence that Nehemiah begins the reconstruction project at the gate that represents the sacrifice of lambs for the justification of God's people. Jesus said,

"Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through Me will be saved. Wherever they go, they will find green pastures." ⁵⁶

Jesus was the Lamb who was slain for us, ⁵⁷ and through His sacrifice we have eternal life with God:

"Once for all time [Jesus] took blood into that Most Holy Place, but not the blood of goats and calves. He took his own blood, and with it he secured our salvation forever." ⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Nehemiah 3:1

⁵⁶ John 10:9

⁵⁷ Revelation 5:6, 12, 13:8

⁵⁸ Hebrews 9:12b

Without this gate of salvation there is no city, no people, no community and no future. It is the Sheep Gate that establishes our identity, purpose and hope. At the Sheep Gate we find the foundation of all things, and the essence of our faith as Christians. A person can have all other areas of their life in order, yet if they fail to have this first gate restored, the gate of accepting Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for their failures, they have no hope. But if this gate is restored...

*"...[God] has rescued us from the one who rules in the kingdom of darkness, and he has brought us into the Kingdom of his dear Son. God has purchased our freedom with his blood and has forgiven all our sins."*⁵⁹

And it is this most fundamental of gates which most mankind fails to believe is necessary to restore by reason of their own sacrifices (i.e., I'm a good person), or their own blindness to the existence of God (i.e., I don't believe in God). It is also the Sheep Gate that many religious people fail to attend to, wanting instead to master the more complex or deeper things of life or presuming this gate is restored because it has been given a fresh coat of moral paint or sanded with the great effort of religious devotion. The High Priest can only restore the Sheep Gate--all other efforts will fail:

*"...God qualified [Jesus] as a perfect High Priest, and he became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him."*⁶⁰

In addition to salvation the Sheep Gate also represents the root of our humility before a Holy God, the place where the enemy cannot dwell, and the place God most certainly dwells. It is the place of highest freedom and greatest joy. It is the embodiment of our faith in Christ and the evidence that we are truly followers of Jesus. It is the gate of worshiping God, giving thanks for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ:

*"Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and bless his name. For the Lord is good. His unfailing love continues forever, and his faithfulness continues to each generation."*⁶¹

In essence the Sheep Gate is comprised of the wood of the cross of Jesus and its functionality is released only when one humbles himself and acknowledges the inherent holiness of God and the wickedness of man. Psalm 29:2 says:

"Give honor to the Lord for the glory of his name. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness."

The word *worship* in the Hebrew (shachah) means to bow down or prostrate oneself in reverence. It infers humility before something superior and therefore the acknowledgment of being inferior. John 4:24 says:

"For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

The word *worship* in the Greek (proskuneo) means to show respect, as a dog licks his master's hand in both affection and subjection. Like its Hebrew meaning, the New Testament definition of worship infers deep humility that translates into expressions of sincere devotion. The evidence of a need to rebuild the "Sheep Gate" in our life is the lack of affection for and subjection to God (or expressions of worship) that translates into spiritual numbness and ultimately rejection of God.

To enforce this required humility the Sheep Gate is a narrow gate:

⁵⁹ Colossian 1:14

⁶⁰ Hebrews 5:9

⁶¹ Psalm 100:4-5

*"You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose the easy way. But the gateway to life is small, and the road is narrow, and only a few ever find it."*⁶²

As much as the Sheep Gate represents salvation, and is fundamental to obtaining salvation, it is the door upon which God knocks to find His true followers defined by their humility and evident actions of worship. John 4:23 tell us:

"But the time is coming and is already here when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for anyone who will worship him that way."

God pursues and dwells with those whose purpose in life, with the help of the Holy Spirit, is to make Him more important than anything else in their life. This means that true worship of God is a lifestyle, not an event, and can only come from a Spirit-filled life walking by faith. We should reject "veneer Christianity" with its devotion only to a thin, cosmetic expression of veiled reality and instead pursue the substance of solid faith. And we should begin the rebuilding of our lives and church community with a renewed devotion to salvation both in our life and the life of others and the worship of God that naturally results from such a gift--for this Sheep Gate represents the healing of the nations through Jesus Christ:

*"Afterward Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. Crowds of sick people--blind, lame or paralyzed--lay on the porches. One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him and knew how long he had been ill, he asked him, 'Would you like to get well?' 'I can't sir,' the sick man said, 'for I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred up. While I am trying to get there, someone else always gets in ahead of me.' Jesus told him, 'Stand up, pick up your sleeping mat and walk!' Instantly the man was healed!"*⁶³

The Fish Gate *(Forsaking the World, Sharing the Gospel)*⁶⁴

The Fish Gate was so named for the massive fish market near the gate. One of the main merchant roads into Jerusalem passed through the Fish Gate and hence it was a place of fevered activity where every walk of life from many nations could be found. This gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenaah (or Senaah), a family from the tribe of Benjamin who had returned with Zerubbabel from exile in Babylon.⁶⁵ There is nothing particularly noteworthy about a fish market or the family of Hassenaah, and that is the hidden point of this passage; for the Fish Gate symbolically represents the marketplace of the world, the places we conduct our daily business often without realizing that these places are filled with people looking for provision, the lost who seek refuge and safety, those God brings to us in the marketplace whom we are prepared by God to "fish" for, and like the family of Hassenaah it is the most ordinary among us that are called to be "fishers of men:"

⁶² Matthew 7:13

⁶³ John 5:1-9a

⁶⁴ Nehemiah

⁶⁵ Ezra 2:35 (It's also interesting to note that like the Sheep Gate someone other than Nehemiah attended to the rebuilding. This symbolizes the work of the Holy Spirit who often conducts the will of God through others.

*"Jesus called out to [Simon and Andrew] and said, 'Come, be my disciples, and I will show you how to fish for people!' And they left their nets at once and went with him."*⁶⁶

Andrew, Matthew, Simon...none of these were prominent, wealthy or gifted men. They were fishermen, tax collectors, and political activists. They would have done business at the Fish Gate like any other merchants and would have blended into the crowd without notice. God determines to use the weak, the lame, and the ordinary to confound the wisdom of this world:

*"Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes, or powerful, or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God deliberately chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose those who are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important, so that no one can ever boast in the presence of God. God alone made it possible for you to be in Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made Christ to be wisdom itself. He is the one who made us acceptable to God. He made us pure and holy, and he gave himself to purchase our freedom. As the Scriptures say, 'The person who wishes to boast should boast only of what the Lord has done.'"*⁶⁷

It is you and me, as ordinary or extraordinary as we are, whom God has saved and called to work the "Fish Gates" of this world; to bring the message of Jesus Christ to the lost. And notice also in Nehemiah's account of the rebuilding of the area of the Fish Gate:

*"Next were the people from Tekoa, though their leaders refused to help."*⁶⁸

Tekoa was a wilderness area noted as "fifteen miles of chaos sinking to...the Dead Sea."⁶⁹ It was an inhospitable place where the prophet Amos was born, where king David sought refuge from Saul, where John the Baptist dwelled and where Satan tempted Jesus. The Tekoites (meaning "trumpet blast"—another symbolic reference to Jesus Christ, his eminent return and eternal life; see I Corinthians 15:52) where therefore hardy people who did not fear difficult tasks, and they diligently applied their limited skills to the rebuilding of the Fish Gate area though their leaders refused to help them in work. So it should be with us—we cannot wait around for others, especially our leaders, to do the work of evangelism. We must endeavor to be spiritual Tekoites who despite the difficulty of their surroundings, limited skills and lack of support from others go about their Father's business. If we wait for brochures, slick plans, rallying cries, special training or throngs of people to join us in order to "fish for men" we essentially stand idle as thousands each day die and find themselves in hell. 2000 years ago God declared that the "Fish Gate" was full of people searching for Jesus and only needed more laborers to reap a harvest:

*"Meanwhile, the disciples were urging Jesus to eat. 'No,' he said, 'I have food you don't know about.' 'Who brought it to him?' the disciples asked each other. Then Jesus explained: 'My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work. Do you think the work of harvesting will not begin until summer ends four months from now? Look around you! Vast fields are ripening all around us and are ready now for the harvest. The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester!'"*⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Matthew 4:18b-20

⁶⁷ I Corinthians 1:26-31

⁶⁸ Nehemiah 3:5

⁶⁹ Dr. George Adam Smith, Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia, Volume 5, pg. 612

⁷⁰ John 4:31-36

And in Matthew 9:37...

"[Jesus] said to his disciples, 'The harvest is so great, but the workers are so few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send out more workers for his fields.'"

Some of us have no Fish Gate, no heart for the lost. Despite our own salvation by grace and the fact that someone shared gospel with us we refuse to extend the same opportunity to others. And there are some of us whose Fish Gates are in need of repair. We once were zealous in our witnessing for Christ but now have become comfortable, busy in our life and "ministries" or slothfully looking to others to do the work. Aren't we thankful those who shared Jesus with us overcame their fear and apathy so that we would have eternal life?

"And they left their nets at once and went with him." ⁷¹

The Fish Gate not only represents the opportunity and biblical command to reach people for Jesus (what we affectionately call evangelism or the Great Commission - Mark 16:15-16), it also naturally symbolizes the dropping of our "nets" in order to follow Jesus. Those nets represent our lives, identities, provision, careers, education, status in society, goals, ambitions and security. *Gradually* letting go of our lives to follow Christ rather than leaving our nets "at once" declares a mistrust of God, or an unrighteous affection for temporary things. We cannot hope to rebuild the Fish Gate in our life if our hands are bound with the cares of this life, and we cannot possibly follow Jesus while dragging behind us our old life or the goal of finding pleasure in this life:

"...And as Christ's soldier, do not let yourself become tied up in the affairs of this life, for then you cannot satisfy the one who has enlisted you in his army." ⁷²

"...And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will have eternal life." ⁷³

"Stop loving this evil world and all that it offers you, for when you love the world, you show that you do not have the love of the Father in you." ⁷⁴

"I say it again, that if your aim is to enjoy this world, you can't be a friend of God." ⁷⁵

Spiritual breakthrough and healing in our life, and the substance of our Christian community, will almost assuredly be fostered by a passion for seeing people saved through Jesus Christ--with our eyes focused on the needs of others over our own.⁷⁶ And this can happen only when we drop our feeble nets of earthly striving and instead take the nets of the gospel given to us by Jesus, for *these* are nets worthy to drop into the waters of life in hope of finding those searching for Jesus.

So upon the foundation of the Sheep Gate, our salvation in and a life of devotion to Jesus Christ, we continue our rebuilding project with a renewed passion for witnessing for Christ, sharing the gospel, evangelizing...these are all components of a healthy relationship with God and necessary for the

⁷¹ Matthew 4:20

⁷² II Timothy 2:4

⁷³ Matthew 19:29

⁷⁴ I John 2:15

⁷⁵ James 4:4

⁷⁶ Philippians 2:4

establishment of His kingdom. If we are to be a community of believers who reach a community of those seeking Christ we must become fishers of men.

The Old City Gate

*(Grounded In Ancient Truth, Submitted to God's Authority)*⁷⁷

God knew what He was doing when He inspired men thousands of years ago to chronicle His love, truth and covenants, and He knew we would be here today in a world of great technological advances and social “enlightenment.”

Yet it is the ancient truth of God’s Word, things done and written thousands of years ago, which will prevail.

The Old City Gate was the seat of authority where the leaders of Israel took their place among the people and symbolizes the ancient foundations of God’s covenant with His people. The two principals who reconstructed the Old City Gate were Joiada whose name means “Jehovah knows” and Meshullam whose name in its root form means “complete, sound covenant of peace.” And God still knows all truth and presents to us a complete and sound covenant of peace today. The use of Joiada and Meshullam to rebuild the Old City Gate represents the divine, complete wisdom of God’s covenant with His people through His written and Living Word and symbolizes the importance of walking in the established statutes of God—for truly God knows better than we and His word remains a covenant of peace:

*"So now the Lord says, 'Stop right where you are! Look for the old, godly way, and walk in it. Travel its path, and you will find rest for your souls...'"*⁷⁸

*"'For the mountains may depart and hills disappear, but even then I will remain loyal to you. My covenant of [peace] will never be broken,' says the Lord, who has mercy on you."*⁷⁹

*"And I will make a covenant of peace with them, an everlasting covenant. I will give them their land and multiply them, and I will put my Temple among them forever. I will make my home among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people."*⁸⁰

Yet despite the wisdom of God available to us through His word and His intention to enforce an agreement of peace between Himself and man we are prone to tear down the Old City Gate in favor of gates of our own designs. Israel did not listen to the Lord and walked on the paths *they* desired rather than the paths of the Lord, and this arrogance brought great destruction.⁸¹ While the Bible records hundreds of instances of people choosing their way rather than God's, one in particular reveals the consequences neglecting the Old City Gate for the promise of a new thing:

"As the people migrated eastward, they found a plain in the land of Babylonia and settled there. They began to talk about construction projects. 'Come,' they said, 'let's make great piles of burnt brick and collect natural asphalt to use as mortar. Let's build a great city with a tower that reaches to the skies—a monument to our greatness! This will bring us together and keep us from scattering all over the world.'

⁷⁷ Nehemiah 3:6

⁷⁸ Jeremiah 6:16

⁷⁹ Isaiah 54:10

⁸⁰ Ezekiel 37:26-27

⁸¹ Jeremiah 18:15-17

*But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. 'Look!' he said. 'If they can accomplish this when they have just begun to take advantage of their common language and political unity, just think of what they will do later. Nothing will be impossible for them! Come, let's go down and give them different languages. Then they won't be able to understand each other.' In that way, the LORD scattered them all over the earth; and that ended the building of the city. That is why the city was called Babel, because it was there that the LORD confused the people by giving them many languages, thus scattering them across the earth."*⁸²

Satan through the will of man constantly seeks to overthrow the timeless foundations of God's truth with temporary monuments of self-indulged faddism—things that have the appearance of wisdom and spirituality but are nothing more than counterfeits of God's handiwork. These modern Towers of Babel are dedicated to exalting man's wisdom or abilities and not God's, where our intention is to do whatever we must do to not be "scattered" but rather to remain sequestered in our subculture religious communities with no hope of reaching the world for Christ, and to make a name for ourselves rather than to raise high the name of Jesus, much like the Church in Sardis in the Book of Revelation:

*"I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive—but you are dead. Now wake up! Strengthen what little remains, for even what is left is at the point of death. Your deeds are far from right in the sight of God. Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly and turn to me again. Unless you do I will come upon you suddenly, as unexpected as a thief."*⁸³

Apparently the Church in Sardis, like the Church in America, was enamored by its reputation and lacked the necessary foundations in God to carry out its divine assignment. The Old City Gate represents a call to return to the foundations of our faith, the roots of our doctrine, the essence of our life in Christ. Solomon writes:

*"History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new. What can you point to that is new? How do you know it didn't already exist long ago? We don't remember what happened in those former times. And in future generations, no one will remember what we are doing."*⁸⁴

How long will our beliefs and methods today last in the corroding influence of our culture? Will our great grandchildren remember the worship songs we sing or the liturgy of our church services? Will people living in the year 2098 have been eternally influenced by life-sized posters of famous Christian entertainers, Christian coffee mugs, CCLI or Charisma Magazine? Is it possible that we have neglected the foundational truths established thousands of years ago which have brought millions to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ for the fashionable Christianity of today? And how did those millions come to know Christ without TV, radio, tape ministries, Christian bookstores, T-shirts, PA systems, VISA cards and seeker sensitivity? And at what cost are we enjoying this fashionable faith—how many will never enter the "Sheep Gate" of salvation because we, the people of God, have neglected the "Old City Gate" of timeless truth?

⁸² Genesis 11:2-9

⁸³ Revelation 3:1b-3

⁸⁴ Ecclesiastes 1:9-12

Clearly the consequences of leaving these foundations of God's truth are the violent waters of separation from God, estrangement from His people and the scattering of entire nations. The Old City Gate stands as a monument to both our strengths and vulnerabilities: the strength of righteousness in truth and the weakness of taking this truth for granted. And despite our love affair with the temporary flesh-feeding faddism of today it is the "old ways" of God that will prevail. This is not to suggest we should mire ourselves in dead tradition or be resistant to change. The depth of our faith is found neither in the "way it used to be" or the "way its going to be" but rather in the eternal truths of God's Word which are not restricted by the passage of time or changing of cultures. We are called and empowered to preach the gospel Jesus preached 2000 years ago without apology and avoid being like the Athenians who "...spent all their time discussing the latest ideas."⁸⁵ It is the path of God's eternal word alone that will bring about the true community of believers God desires for His people.

And the Old City Gate also represents the seat of authority and submission to that authority. Historically it was the location where the Israelite princes sat in their place of honor, and therefore it was a key target for the enemies of Jerusalem. Because of its strategic importance the Babylonians made the Old City Gate the final point of breakthrough in their siege of Jerusalem in the summer of 586 BC. Where once the Israelite princes Eliakim and Hilkiah (who bore the name of the God of Israel) sat in their place of honor they were replaced by the Babylonian generals Nergal-sharezer and Samgar-nebo (who bore the name of heathen gods) who then sat in defiance of Jerusalem, Israel and God.⁸⁶ The forces of Babylon knew that if they could destroy the Old City Gate they could control the city, and likewise the enemy knows that if authority can be undermined he can control marriages, families and ministries.

Regarding rebellion against authority, the Bible tells us to be subject to those in authority, and do not malign anyone, to not speak against one another, and to submit to one another in the fear of God. We are to obey those who rule over us and be submissive, for they watch out for our souls as those who must give account.⁸⁷ We must let our leaders lead with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for us to cause such grief. We must submit ourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men; whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by God to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good we should silence the ignorant talk of men. And everyone must submit themselves to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.⁸⁸ God establishes the authorities that exist. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgement on themselves.⁸⁹

Many of us have been deceived by our culture into thinking that submission to authority can be on our terms regardless of what God says, and that we can resist submission simply on the basis that we disagree with or dislike the leadership God as appointed over us. King David was a good example of righteous submission. Despite serving a ruthless, godless, and immoral King Saul, even when his life was endangered by this very authority David understood the sovereignty of God and declared "*I will not stretch out my hand against [Saul] for he is God's anointed.*"⁹⁰ And neither did David defend himself against his rebellious son Absalom who sought to kill him and overthrow his kingdom, but instead

⁸⁵ Acts 17:21

⁸⁶ Jeremiah 39:1-4

⁸⁷ Obey: to listen to, yield to, comply with, trust, and have confidence in leadership

⁸⁸ Subject/Submit: to arrange oneself in a military fashion under the command of a leader, or to voluntarily give in to, cooperate with, and assume responsibility under a leader

⁸⁹ Titus 3:1-2, James 4:11, Ephesians 5:21, Hebrews 13:17, I Peter 2:13-15 and Romans 13:1-2 respectively

⁹⁰ I Samuel 24:10

declared, “Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom”⁹¹ and “Beware, lest anyone touch the young man Absalom!”⁹² Jesus was a perfect example of submission, for He never defended Himself to His accusers and was submitted even unto death.

Like the siege against the Old City Gate of Jerusalem, the consequences of rebellion against authority are devastating:

1. Death and loss of spiritual inheritance⁹³
2. God's rejection and wrath⁹⁴
3. A dry spiritual life⁹⁵
4. Shame and humiliation⁹⁶
5. Misery⁹⁷
6. Banishment and physical illness⁹⁸

Proverbs 1:7 says:

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge/wisdom; fools despise wisdom and instruction."

To disregard either the *position* of authority or *instruction* of authority is to disregard the Lord Himself, or it is the fear of God that initiates our freedom from such sin.

The Old City Gate is the place where we rebuild the foundations of our faith and renew again our commitment to be people under the authority of God. It is where we are often most vulnerable: our doctrine, our motives and our methods. It is the gate most likely to experience cultural change and thereby be diminished into simply another door rather than the very entrance into the heart and mind of God. Let us return to the Ancient of Days:

*"The Judge is the Ancient of days himself, God the Father, the glory of whose presence is here described. He is called the Ancient of days, because he is God from everlasting to everlasting. Among men we reckon that with the ancient is wisdom, and days shall speak; shall not all flesh then be silent before him who is the Ancient of days?"*⁹⁹

Let us rebuild the Old City Gate of God's authority and wisdom in our life, and let us hold aloft for all to see the banner of truth which declares that the wisdom of man is foolishness to God¹⁰⁰ and declare the doxology of Romans 11:33-36:

"Oh, what a wonderful God we have! How great are his riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his methods! For who can know what the Lord is thinking? Who knows enough to be his counselor? And who could ever give him so much that he would

⁹¹ II Samuel 18:5

⁹² II Samuel 18:12

⁹³ Children of Israel in the wilderness/Numbers 14:20-35, Korah's rebellion/Numbers 16, Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11, and I Corinthians 6:9-10, 10:1-11, Galatians 5:19-20

⁹⁴ Saul's demise/I Samuel 15:20-24

⁹⁵ Psalm 68:6

⁹⁶ Isaiah 30:1-5

⁹⁷ Isaiah 62:2-15

⁹⁸ Aaron and Miriam/Numbers 12:1-16

⁹⁹ Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997.

¹⁰⁰ I Corinthians 1:17-25

have to pay it back? For everything comes from him; everything exists by his power and is intended for his glory. To him be glory evermore. Amen.”

The Valley Gate *(Godly Character Developed Through Adversity) ¹⁰¹*

This is where Nehemiah began his original inspection of the damage to the wall and gates of the city,¹⁰² and it from here that Ezra and Nehemiah began the dedication of the newly restored walls and gates¹⁰³--interesting in that Nehemiah begins his inspection and dedication at the place which so lucidly represents the struggles from which the Children of Israel had come and the struggles they were about to embark upon. The Valley Gate was located near the Valley of Hinnom; a deep narrow gorge to the southwest of Jerusalem used in later years for the burning of corpses of criminals and animals. The Hebrew term *Hinnom* translates “lamentation” and its other Hebrew form *geenna* translates “hell fire” from which the Greek term *Gehenna* is translated “Hell.” When talking about Hell and specifically the reality of an unquenchable fire reserved for those who reject God, Jesus often referred to the Valley of Hinnom.¹⁰⁴ Regarding those who repaired the Valley Gate, Hanum (which translates “gracious”) from the people of Zanoah (which translates “cast off”), led those who repaired the Valley Gate. The Valley of Hinnom terminated at the Pool of Siloam, (a fact to be explored in the discussion regarding the Fountain Gate).

All of this leads to a profound symbolism regarding the Valley Gate: It is the place that symbolizes the narrow valleys or low spots of our life which provide us opportunity to develop strength of character, which in turn helps us in our future challenges:

“Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything.” ¹⁰⁵

And it is in the fires of trial and tribulation that our character (hence hope) is forged:

“We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us--they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character in us, and character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation. And this expectation will not disappoint us.” ¹⁰⁶

While we are often “cast off” (referring to Zanoah) by our circumstances it is the grace of God (symbolized by Hanum) that sustains us:

“...But to keep my from getting puffed up, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep be from getting proud. Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, ‘My gracious favor is all you need. My power works best in your weakness.’ So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may work through me. Since I know it is all for Christ’s good, I am quite content with my weaknesses and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong...” ¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Nehemiah 3:13

¹⁰² Nehemiah 2:13-15

¹⁰³ Nehemiah 12:31,39

¹⁰⁴ Matthew 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33

¹⁰⁵ James 1:2-4

¹⁰⁶ Romans 5:3-5

¹⁰⁷ II Corinthians 12:7b-10

Our life on earth is a giant crucible, a refining fire that prepares us for eternity:

“But He [God] knows the way I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” ¹⁰⁸

“I have refined you but not in the way silver is refined. Rather, I have refined you in the furnace of suffering.” ¹⁰⁹

“These trials are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold. So if your faith remains strong after being tried by fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.” ¹¹⁰

“That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are quite small and won’t last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever! So we don’t look at the troubles we can see right now; rather, we look forward to what we have not yet seen. For the troubles we see will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever.” ¹¹¹

Even the discipline of God is intended to bring about eternal glory:

“For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God’s discipline is always right and good for us because it means we will share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it is painful! But afterward there will be a quiet harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.” ¹¹²

“My child, don’t ignore it when the Lord disciplines you, and don’t be discouraged when he corrects you. For the Lord corrects those he loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights.” ¹¹³

It’s in the long journeys in the wilderness, the times of challenge and discipline, the places of pain that we most clearly (or perspicuously) understand the character of God; the uniqueness of His love and care for us and the power of His might. Yet we so diligently work to avoid pain in our life; from selfishly keeping the liberating truth of God’s Word to ourselves for fear of the pain of rejection, to lying about our circumstances to avoid the pain of discipline, to ingesting drugs and food to mask the pain of our identity crises, and to subscribing to “politically correct” philosophies (e.g. tolerance, overlooking immorality, etc.) to obscure the pain of admitting we are sinners in need of salvation. In some cases, Christians themselves, in a desire to avoid the Valley Gate of humility and pain, will follow the ways of the world. Paul writes to the Church in Corinth:

“When you have something against another Christian, why do you file a lawsuit and ask a secular court to decide the matter, instead of taking it to other Christians to decide who was right? Don’t you know that someday we Christians are going to judge the world? And since you are going to judge the world, can’t you decide these little things among yourselves? Don’t you realize that we Christians will judge angels? So you should surely be able to resolve ordinary disagreements here on earth. If you have legal disputes

¹⁰⁸ Job 23:10 (KJV)

¹⁰⁹ Isaiah 48:10

¹¹⁰ I Peter 1:7

¹¹¹ II Corinthians 4:16-18

¹¹² Hebrews 12:10-11

¹¹³ Proverbs 3:11

*about such matters, why do you go to outside judges who are not respected by the church? I am saying this to shame you. Isn't there anyone in all the church who is wise enough to decide these arguments? But instead, one Christian sues another—right in front of unbelievers! To have such lawsuits at all is a real defeat for you. Why not just accept the injustice and leave it at that? Why not let yourselves be cheated? But instead, you yourselves are the ones who do wrong and cheat even your own Christian brothers and sisters.”*¹¹⁴

Jesus said it succinctly:

*“But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will act as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust.”*¹¹⁵

The truth is we must walk through the Valley Gate to find our freedom, and we must accurately define this gate and the things it represents; for valleys caused by our own decisions to reject God and His ways are worthy of no honor or credit to us:

*“For God is pleased with you when, for the sake of your conscience, you patiently endure unfair treatment. Of course, you get no credit for being patient when you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing right and are patient beneath the blows [of persecution or discipline], God is pleased with you.”*¹¹⁶

With Christ as our supreme example, we should gladly descend into the valleys of humility since Christ Himself descended from the heights of heaven and took the form of a man in the valley of this world:

*“Your attitude should be the same as Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing, he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross. And because of this, God raised him up to the heights of heaven and gave him a name that is above every other name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*¹¹⁷

*“This suffering is all part of what God has called you to. Christ, who suffered for you, is your example. Follow in his steps. He never sinned, and he never deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when he was insulted. When he suffered, he did not threaten to get even. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. He personally carried away our sins in his own body on the cross so we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. You have been healed by his wounds!”*¹¹⁸

By following this same path of freedom, by rebuilding the Valley Gate and our allegiance to suffering for Christ, we are on our way to becoming a true community of believers who grow together in endurance, faith and hope. For truly, just as there is no Promised Land without a wilderness and no resurrection without crucifixion, there **IS** a Promised Land on the other side of the wilderness and there **IS** a resurrection after the crucifixion!

¹¹⁴ I Corinthians 6:1-8

¹¹⁵ Matthew 5:44-45

¹¹⁶ I Peter 2:19-20

¹¹⁷ Philippians 2:5-11

¹¹⁸ I Peter 2:21-24

The Refuse Gate

*(The Call to Purity)*¹¹⁹

This is the gate where waste in all forms was taken out of the city. Can you imagine the difficulty of repairing such a gate! Yet without such a gate the city would have buried itself in filth. All things that produce unnecessary byproducts must have a means to rid themselves of such things. Our physical bodies are similarly designed, and so is the body of Christ. The Refuse Gate represents the need for cleansing; developing a means to remove that which defiles, degrades and is unclean. It's that place in our life that brings about and requires examination, confession and obedience:

*"Because we have these promises [from God], dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us work toward complete purity because we fear God."*¹²⁰

*"Wash yourselves and be clean! Let me no longer see your evil deeds. Give up your wicked ways. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the orphan. Fight for the rights of widows."*¹²¹

One of the most challenging "gates" in the life of a community of believers is the dedication to moral and spiritual purity. So often this is discarded as legalism or extreme spirituality, but God Himself declared through His prophets:

*"I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore, come out from them and separate yourselves from them, says the Lord. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you. And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."*¹²²

A community of believers must stand peculiar to the world and dedicate themselves in the power of the Holy Spirit to a life pleasing to the Lord and edifying to the Body of Christ. To dismiss the Refuse Gate as irrelevant (i.e. faith needs no evidence or purity equals legalism) or even automatic (i.e. Christians will automatically walk in moral and spiritual purity) is to deny the liberating commands of God:

*"Be holy as I am holy."*¹²³

Peter quotes from the 11th chapter of the book of Leviticus, a chapter filled with instructions from the Lord to His people regarding what is "clean" and "unclean" and therefore how to stay holy or sacred and set apart. Interestingly this exhortation to holiness is built on the foundation of very practical instructions (e.g. do not eat ravens or lizards) and not merely things spiritual. Purity and holiness, while spiritually imparted are practically maintained. In other words, as God has purified us through the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ we still must choose to not engage in things that defile us.

A "refuse gate" is necessary in our lives—a place and means to rid ourselves of impurity—and it is most clearly established and maintained *in the lives of those who have already given up this world to follow Jesus* by the following:

Examination

¹¹⁹ Nehemiah 3:14

¹²⁰ II Corinthians 7:1

¹²¹ Isaiah 1:16-17

¹²² II Corinthians. 6:16b-18 as quoting from Leviticus 16:12, Ezekiel 20:34, 37:27 and Isaiah 52:11

¹²³ I Peter 1:16 as quoting Leviticus 11:44-45

*“Examine yourselves to see if your faith is really genuine. Test yourselves. If you cannot tell that Jesus Christ is among you, it means you have failed the test.”*¹²⁴

*“Put me on trial, Lord, and cross-examine me. Test my motives and affections.”*¹²⁵

*“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts.”*¹²⁶

*“Try to live in peace with everyone, and seek to live a clean and holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord. Look after each other so that none of you will miss out on the special favor of God. Watch out that no bitter root of unbelief rises up among you, for whenever it springs up, many are corrupted by its poison. Make sure that no one is immoral or godless like Esau.”*¹²⁷

We are not to judge¹²⁸ but we are to “test” the community of believers in Christ in an attitude of genuine love and concern to make sure we are not walking in the delusion that we are doing well when we are not. The practical application of this examination best begins and ends with keeping the focus of such testing on ourselves that we might be holy as He is holy.

Confession and Accountability

*“If we say we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth. But if we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that His word has no place in our hearts.”*¹²⁹

*“Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results.”*¹³⁰

“The next morning, as he thought about it, Pharaoh became very concerned as to what the dreams might mean. So he called for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt and told them about his dreams, but not one of them could suggest what they meant. Then the king’s cup-bearer spoke up. ‘Today, I have been reminded of my failure,’ he said.” [The story continues with the cup-bearer remembering a man named Joseph who could interpret Pharaoh’s dream, and Joseph subsequent rise to power in Egypt.]¹³¹

[Following David’s to return to Jerusalem from exile] *“As the king was about to cross the river, Shimei fell down before him. ‘My lord the king, please forgive me,’ he pleaded. ‘Forget the terrible thing I did when you left Jerusalem. I know how much I sinned. That is why I have come here today, the very first person in all Israel, to greet you.’ Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said, ‘Shimei should die, for he cursed the Lord’s anointed king!’ ‘What am I going to do with you sons of Zeruiah!’ David exclaimed. ‘This is not a day for execution but for celebration! I am once again king of Israel!’ Then, turning to Shimei, David vowed, ‘Your life will be spared.’”*¹³²

¹²⁴ II Corinthians 13:5

¹²⁵ Psalm 26:2

¹²⁶ Psalm 139:23

¹²⁷ Hebrews 12:14-16a

¹²⁸ Matthew 7:1

¹²⁹ I John 1:8-10

¹³⁰ James 5:16

¹³¹ Genesis 41:8-9

¹³² II Samuel 19:18b-22

As so it shall be for many of us...Jesus will once again cross the river between heaven and earth and those who have fallen at His feet in confession and accountability before Him will have their lives spared. Confession and accountability is one of the best ways to say, "I need Jesus" and to help facilitate purity in our life.

Obedience to God

*"Don't you realize that whatever you choose to obey becomes you master? You can choose sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God and receive his approval."*¹³³

*"Not all people who sound religious are really godly. They may refer to me as 'Lord' but they still won't enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The decisive issue is whether they obey my Father in heaven."*¹³⁴

*"Therefore go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you."*¹³⁵

*"...But anyone who listens and doesn't obey is like a person who builds a house without a foundation. When the floods sweep down against the house, it will crumble into a heap of ruins..."*¹³⁶

*"Jesus replied, 'My mother and brothers are all those who hear the message of God and obey it.'"*¹³⁷

*"When you obey me you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father and remain in his love."*¹³⁸

*"Jesus replied, 'All those who love me do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and live with them. Anyone who doesn't love me will not do what I say.'"*¹³⁹

There is simply no better way to remain pure than to obey God.

As a by-product of sin, and even of our quest for examination, confession and obedience, there will be refuse and rubble in the life of a Christian! Proverbs 14:4 tells us:

"An empty stable stays clean, but no income comes from an empty stable."

In other words there is a lot of "rubble" in a remodeling project. The people of Judah complained about the amount of debris produced by the work on the walls and gates of Jerusalem¹⁴⁰ and we must not be like them. There is a lot of "refuse" as a result of God purifying His people, and as long as that waste is the casting off of sin and wickedness we can rejoice and determine to rebuild the mechanisms of examination, confession, accountability and obedience to God's Word that facilitates this cleansing. And we have these promises to stand on:

¹³³ Romans 6:16

¹³⁴ Matthew 7:21

¹³⁵ Matthew 28:19-20a

¹³⁶ Luke 6:49

¹³⁷ Luke 8:21

¹³⁸ John 15:10

¹³⁹ John 14:23-24a

¹⁴⁰ Nehemiah 4:10

*“‘Come now, let us argue this out,’ says the Lord. ‘No matter how deep the stain of your sins, I can remove it. I can make you as clean as freshly fallen snow. Even if you are stained as red as crimson, I can make you as white as wool. If you will only obey me and let me help you...’”*¹⁴¹

*“There was a time when you were just like [the world], but now your sins have been washed away, and you have been set apart for God. You have been made right with God because of what the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God have done for you.”*¹⁴²

Let us rebuild the Refuse Gate that keeps us pure and holy before God. Let us restore the mechanisms of grace whereby we cleanse ourselves from all unrighteousness. Let us stand tall amidst the rubble of discarded sin and worldly pursuits and diligently cast these things not at each other but through the refuse “gate” of the cross of Jesus where all things set against us are nailed.

The Fountain Gate *(The Spirit-Filled Life)*¹⁴³

The Fountain Gate (also known as The Gate Between Two Walls) comes, interestingly, after the gates representing humility (the Valley Gate) and purity (the Refuse Gate). Before a fountain of life can flow through us there must be humility and purity in us.

The Fountain Gate symbolizes *a means of freedom and escape*, as it is the gate through which King Zedekiah and his army fled while Jerusalem was under siege by Nebuchadnezzar’s army in 587 BC,¹⁴⁴ and *healing*, as it where a blind man regained his sight when Jesus instructed him to wash in the nearby Pool of Siloam.

This means of freedom and healing is most clearly seen in the effects of the Spirit-filled life—that place where hell ends and life begins, (remember the Valley of Hinnom, symbolizing hell, terminates at the Pool of Siloam nearest the Fountain Gate. The word “Siloam” is translated “Sent” and refers to Jesus Himself, the Holy One sent from God. The Fountain Gate is that place of escape from the bondage of sin and death, which leads to the healing waters of life:¹⁴⁵

*“...Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, ‘If you are thirsty, come to me! If you believe in me, come and drink! For the Scriptures declare that rivers of living water will flow out from within.’ (When he said ‘living water,’ he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him...)”*¹⁴⁶

And referring to the exodus of God’s people from Egypt to the Promised Land:

*“You sent your good Spirit to instruct them, and you did not stop giving them bread from heaven or water for their thirst. For forty years you sustained them in the wilderness. They lacked nothing in all that time. Their clothes did not wear out, and their feet did not swell!”*¹⁴⁷

¹⁴¹ Isaiah 1:18-19a

¹⁴² I Corinthians 6:11

¹⁴³ Nehemiah 3:15

¹⁴⁴ II Kings 25:4, Jeremiah 39:4, 52:7

¹⁴⁵ John 9:1-7

¹⁴⁶ John 7:37b-39a

¹⁴⁷ Nehemiah 9:20

Clearly God intends His people to live in the power of His Spirit, and it is by this Spirit that we function most effectively as Christians:

“And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us.” ¹⁴⁸

“It is the Spirit who gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing. And the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” ¹⁴⁹

“The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as he raised Christ from the dead, he will give life to your mortal body by this same Spirit living within you.” ¹⁵⁰

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not be presenting his own ideas; he will be telling you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me [Jesus] glory by revealing to you whatever he receives from me.” ¹⁵¹

“Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you what he promised. Remember, I have told you about this before. John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁵²

“But when the Father sends the Counselor as my [Jesus] representative—and by Counselor I mean the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I myself have told you.” ¹⁵³

A life filled with the Holy Spirit is so important to God that sin against the Holy Spirit is the only sin that will never be forgiven—a one way ticket to eternal damnation:

“Every sin or blasphemy can be forgiven—except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which can never be forgiven. Anyone who blasphemes against me [Jesus], the Son of Man, can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, either in this world or in the world to come.” ¹⁵⁴

This blasphemy of God’s Spirit, which is the deliberate rejection of that which we know to be clearly of God, permanently clogs the flow of the fountain of life and renders a person without hope. God wants the flow of His Holy Spirit to be as unobstructed as possible:

“Do not stifle the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁵⁵

And without the Holy Spirit we cannot belong to God:

“But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them are not Christians at all.)” ¹⁵⁶

Since Christians have the Holy Spirit in them, hindering or stopping the flow of God’s Spirit in our life is dangerous. When King Sennacherib of Assyria made known to King Hezekiah of Judah his intentions to

¹⁴⁸ I John 4:13

¹⁴⁹ John 6:63

¹⁵⁰ Romans 8:11

¹⁵¹ John 16:13-14

¹⁵² Acts 1:4-5

¹⁵³ John 14:26

¹⁵⁴ Matthew 12:31-32

¹⁵⁵ I Thessalonians 5:19a

¹⁵⁶ Romans 8:9

attack Jerusalem, Hezekiah did everything he could to insure a continued flow of water into the city; by averting the flow of the springs of Gihon from outside the city through a newly built tunnel into the Pool of Siloam inside the city wall.¹⁵⁷ We should be as diligent to keep the enemy from hindering or stopping the flow of the Holy Spirit by repairing and maintaining the “Fountain Gate” in our life, and in doing so rejoice as our enemy is defeated and never allowed to taste of that Water of Life! And a believer in Christ who walks in the Spirit of God will be a fruitful and fulfilled person:

*“But they that delight in doing everything the Lord wants; day and night they think about his law. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season without fail. Their leaves never wither, and in all they do they prosper.”*¹⁵⁸

*“But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they go right on producing delicious fruit.”*¹⁵⁹

In these passages we find **the secret to living a Spirit-filled life:**

***First, delight in doing everything the Lord wants.** This means we should take pleasure in pleasing God—it should not be a chore to do His will:

*“And so, dear Christian friends, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask? Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is.”*¹⁶⁰

The key word in this passage is “let”—let your body be a living sacrifice, let God transform you into a new person. We know it is God’s intent to conform us into the image of Christ therefore we must let this happen by not blocking the flow of the Holy Spirit. And how do we block the flow of His Spirit? (READ Ephesians 5:1-20 and I Peter 4:1-6)

***Second, think about God’s will day and night.** This means we perpetually ponder, meditate upon and muse on God’s instructions and directions—to be in a natural and constant state of “hmmm.” (The Hebrew word for “meditate” as found in Psalm 1:3 is *hagah* which implies a contemplative state of musing that would naturally result in a verbalized form of such meditation.)

Job, who knew well the “Valley Gate” of humility and “Refuse Gate” of purity, said this:

*“For I have stayed in God’s paths; I have followed his ways and not turned aside. I have not departed from his commands but have treasured his word in my heart.”*¹⁶¹

And the Psalmist wrote:

*“I have hidden [treasured] your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you [Lord].”*¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ II Chronicles 32:1-8, II Kings 20:20

¹⁵⁸ Psalm 1:3

¹⁵⁹ Jeremiah 17:7-8

¹⁶⁰ Romans 12:1-2

¹⁶¹ Job 23:11-12

In order to have a functioning “Fountain Gate” in our life, not only are we to delight in the ways of God we are let these ways have their way in us, as the Apostle Paul says:

*“Don’t be drunk with wine [in other words, don’t be taken over by the ways of the world], because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you.”*¹⁶³

*And third, the key to maintaining a Spirit-filled life is to **place our trust in the Lord** by making Him our hope and confidence. This means to unquestionably place our security in God—to make Him, not merely allow Him, to be our hope. As Jeremiah 17:7 says “...But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence.”

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will direct your paths.”*¹⁶⁴

*“Fearing people is a dangerous trap, but to trust the Lord means safety.”*¹⁶⁵

*“You [God] will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, whose thoughts are fixed on you!”*¹⁶⁶

So we see, in order for the flow of God’s Spirit to remain free we have a responsibility to not block the flow, and to take proactive steps like Hezekiah did in insuring the flow of healing water to Jerusalem. Just as Hezekiah’s tunnel for that flow of water took a lot of determination, so, too, does maintaining the flow of the Holy Spirit in our life.

And in these passages (Psalm 1:3, Jeremiah 17:7-8), we find the **rewards of a Spirit-filled life**:

*First, **perpetual fruitfulness**. This means our life is more than mere existence—we have eternal impact without cessation—and the fruits of our life endure:

*“But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict with the law.”*¹⁶⁷

It is important to note that we do not produce these fruits (or evidence of the Holy Spirit in our life) but the *Holy Spirit* produces this evidence. Again, since God intends to fill and guide us with His Spirit, and since the Spirit Himself is responsible for the outward evidence of that filling, all we must do is maintain a clear pathway for the flow—a Fountain Gate!

*Second, **Spirit-filled and led people never fade and are always prospering in their heart**. This means that despite our circumstances, despite the spiritual drought of the world, we always have joy, peace and hope:

*“With joy you will drink deeply from the fountain of salvation! In that wonderful day you will sing: ‘Thank the Lord! Praise his name! Tell the world what he has done...Oh, how mighty he is!’”*¹⁶⁸

¹⁶² Psalm 119:11

¹⁶³ Ephesians 5:18

¹⁶⁴ Proverbs 3:5-6

¹⁶⁵ Proverbs 29:25

¹⁶⁶ Isaiah 26:3

¹⁶⁷ Galatians 5:22-23

*“Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation. The Sovereign Lord is my strength! He will make me as surefooted as a deer and bring me safely over the mountains.”*¹⁶⁹

*“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”*¹⁷⁰

And God’s encouragement to us is this:

*“So don’t get tired of doing what is good. Don’t get discouraged and give up, for we will reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time.”*¹⁷¹

*And third, people with functional Fountain Gates are **not destroyed by dire circumstances**. No matter how hot it gets, or how dry the well of life runs, our roots will always reach the source of life, the Water of Life, Jesus Christ.

*“But those who wait on the Lord will find new strength. They will fly high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.”*¹⁷²

To have an effective community of believers we must have the flow of God’s Spirit—the Fountain Gate—as our source of refreshment and course of life. This fountain gives us the ability to endure any circumstance because through it we live from the infinite well of God’s Spirit. It is through the strength of the Fountain Gate that rivers of living water flow from us, for us, and extend to others and refresh them in a dry and parched land of spiritual drought. Truly rivers of living water will flow from those who put their trust in the Lord!

The Water Gate

(Established by Eternal Truth)¹⁷³

An enormous amount of work happens on the walls of Jerusalem between the Fountain Gate and the next gate, the Water Gate. Living a Spirit-filled life (symbolized by the Fountain Gate) although filled with peace, joy and hope, is not a life of leisure or sloth. There is a lot of hard work required in maintaining a life focused on things of the Spirit. What this means is that when we are born-again and the Spirit of God indwells within us we are given a new operating system that demands that we function differently from before. Certain “applications” or old ways of thinking and doing don’t work with the new operating system. And continuing the computer metaphor a bit further, many of us suffer system crashes because we refuse to adhere to the demands of the new operating system. Since there are no “bugs” in the word of God, the problems we encounter in trying to do things our way are our fault alone.

¹⁶⁸ Isaiah 12:3-4

¹⁶⁹ Habakkuk 3:17-19

¹⁷⁰ Romans 14:17

¹⁷¹ Galatians 6:9

¹⁷² Isaiah 40:31

¹⁷³ Nehemiah 3:26

In the rebuilding of the walls and gates of Jerusalem, here at the Water Gate begins a peculiar pattern; for the Bible mentions no repairs on the four remaining gates of the city of Jerusalem. As we examine these final gates we will understand the reason why there was no need for repair.

The Water Gate is the seventh of the gates of Jerusalem—the biblical number of perfection or completeness—and indeed, as we’ll see momentarily, that which the Water Gate symbolizes is perfect and complete. It was at the Water Gate that Ezra opened the word of God and read it to the people, thereby renewing God’s covenant with them, where the booths were erected for celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles¹⁷⁴ and where the people confessed their sins and vowed to follow God.¹⁷⁵ It is here at the Water Gate that we find God’s word—a gate that needs no repair for His word stands forever—a turning point where people are forced to decide whether their allegiance will be to God or the world:

*"Your word [O Lord] is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path."*¹⁷⁶

*"Forever, O Lord, your word stands firm in heaven."*¹⁷⁷

*"The grass withers, and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever."*¹⁷⁸

*"For the word of God is full of living power. It is sharper than the sharpest knife, cutting deep into our innermost thoughts and desires. It exposes us for what we really are."*¹⁷⁹

*"Heaven and earth will disappear, but my [Jesus'] words will remain forever."*¹⁸⁰

*"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God’s way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do."*¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁴ The Feast of Tabernacles was the final and most important feast of the year, lasting for seven days (from the 15th through the 21st of the seventh month). This feast functioned not only as an agricultural thanksgiving at the end of the fall fruit harvest and so was called the "Feast of Ingathering," (Ex. 34:22; Deut. 16:13-15), but also as a commemorative celebration of God’s protective care during the 40-year period in the wilderness between Egypt and Canaan when Israelites lived in tents (thus the name Feast of Tabernacles, or "booths," (Lev. 23:43). On both the first day and the eighth day (the concluding day of the annual feasts following the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles), the Israelites were to hold a sacred assembly and were to do no occupational work. The offerings to be brought were the most elaborate and impressive of the entire year (cf. Num. 29:12-38). This parenthetical section indicates that the scheduled festival offerings for the feasts of the LORD (cf. Num. 28-29) were to be in addition to the weekly offerings (those for the LORD’S Sabbaths) and the voluntary offerings of individual worshipers (e.g., freewill offerings). They were also in addition to the special monthly new moon offerings (Num. 28:11-15; 29:6; etc.). Following the digression in verses 37-38, the calendar of the Feast of Tabernacles was restated (v. 39) and the particulars of the thanksgiving festivities announced (vv. 40-43). The choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars may have been used in constructing the booths in which the people were to live for seven days as a reminder of the tents they lived in when they first came out of Egypt. The importance of this festival is indicated by the statement, This is to be a lasting ordinance. The divine pronouncement, I am the LORD your God, concludes this section on the feasts of the seventh month (cf. v. 23). See also Zechariah 14:16-21 and the Feast of Tabernacles connection to the coming of Christ’s eternal kingdom.

¹⁷⁵ Nehemiah 8-10

¹⁷⁶ Psalm 119:105

¹⁷⁷ Psalm 119:89

¹⁷⁸ Isaiah 40:8

¹⁷⁹ Hebrews 4:12

¹⁸⁰ Matthew 24:35

¹⁸¹ II Timothy 3:16-17

God's word written (the Bible) and God's Word living (Jesus)¹⁸² are the foundation of all truth, the pathway for understanding God and accepting His plan of salvation, and nourishment and hope for the journey. And the Living Word gave His life that the written word might have its perfect affect on the Church:

*“And you husbands must love your wives with the same love Christ showed the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by baptism and God's word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.”*¹⁸³

The word of God is a powerful cleansing agent—both the blood of the Living Word and the eternal truth of God's written word. As a precursor to the Holy Spirit, Nehemiah knew that the rebuilding and liberation of Jerusalem would stand only on the strength of God's word and the people's correct response to it, and the same is true if we are to build our lives on a solid foundation. When Ezra opened the Book of the Law of Moses at the Water Gate he was by the hand of God restoring God's word to the people, and in response the people did three things:

***Paid close attention to it.**¹⁸⁴ We cannot hope to understand God nor His ways unless we give our full attention to reading, studying, absorbing and digesting the Bible. God gave us His written word for a good reason—to establish an unchanging view of Him and to illuminate the path to salvation. The spiritual success or failure of many Christians is directly connected to how much they read and heed the word of God.

***Stood and affirmed the reading of the word with worship.**¹⁸⁵ If we choose to selectively obey God's word or deny it altogether we have little chance of finding the narrow gate to heaven. His word is a “lamp unto our feet” which reveals where we are, and a “light unto our path” showing us where we must go to follow Him. We must honor, agree with and obey God's word if we are to be in covenant with it and reap the benefits of that conformity.

***Mourned at the recognition of how far they were from God's ways.**¹⁸⁶ When the light of God's word shines on us there is a natural response to feel convicted as we measure our current distance from God's ultimate plan for us. Yet we must view this distance with an appropriate perspective—it is God's pleasure to reveal His word to us, not only to illuminate our need for Him but also to underscore His intent and capability of meeting that need. If we simply follow and obey Him we can, like Nehemiah and Ezra encouraged the people to do, rejoice at the faithfulness of God to reveal His plan to us; for indeed, the joy of the Lord is our strength.

While the Water Gate (the word of God) needs no repair it certainly requires something on our part if we are to use this gate effectively. Historically, spiritual reform and revival often came as a result of a return to God's word. From the post-exile revival of Israel, to the Reformation led by Martin Luther, to the Brownsville revival in Florida today, when the word of God is restored there is a revelation of our need for God, remorse at the recognition of our distance from God, repentance from the ways which kept us from God, reform in the ways we follow God, renewal of our hope and joy, and revival which brings many others to a revelation of their need for God and so on. We need not, and should not, wait for a corporate return to God's word but instead should endeavor to fulfill a personal, individual return to the

¹⁸² John 1:1

¹⁸³ Ephesians 5:25-27

¹⁸⁴ Nehemiah 8:3

¹⁸⁵ Nehemiah 8:5-6

¹⁸⁶ Nehemiah 8:9b

word of God. A collective of these empowered individuals will most certainly bring a wave of spiritual revival.

Unlike times past when the Bible was unavailable to the masses, we have no excuses. At our fingertips is the eternal, powerful and liberating word of God that can set many others and us free. While it is the responsibility of pastors and teachers to rightly divide the word of truth and explain accurately the word of God as Ezra and the Levites did in Jerusalem, our ignorance of the Bible is nobody's fault but our own. Given the current trends to dismiss the Bible as irrelevant or even abhorrent, we must all the more understand, adhere to and proclaim the word of God. The eternal word of God, the Bible, must remain our foundation if we are to understand and act out our place as a community of believers in the Living Word, Jesus Christ. Therefore let us gather at the Water Gate and hear again the word of God, and let us be doers of the word and not merely hearers:

“And remember, it [the word of God] is a message to obey, not just to listen to. If you don’t obey, you are only fooling yourself. For if you just listen and don’t obey, it is like looking at your face in a mirror but doing nothing to improve your appearance. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you keep looking steadily into God’s perfect law—the law that sets you free—and you do what it says and don’t forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.”¹⁸⁷

The Horse Gate *(The Lordship of Christ)¹⁸⁸*

Also known as the Foundation Gate, or Sur Gate, there are two historical components that illustrate symbolically the application of this gate spiritually today. First, it was at the Horse Gate Queen Athaliah's execution took place.¹⁸⁹ Athaliah was the daughter of Jezebel and Ahab, the seventh King of Israel. She assumed the throne of Judah after the death of her son King Ahaziah and immediately brought Judah into spiritual ruin through idol worship. When Jehoiada the priest conspired to make another of her sons, Joash, the new king, Athaliah was infuriated. She was eventually overthrown and killed at the Horse Gate. Second, the Horse Gate was also the main connection between the king's palace and the temple, through which the king's horses were brought into the city.

How does the death of Athaliah and the physical connection between the palace and the temple in Jerusalem provide spiritual relevance to us today? These things illustrate the importance of removing idolatry from our life (symbolized in the overthrow of Athaliah) by maintaining the important connection between the “palace” (which represents the authority of God in heaven) and the “temple” (representing the presence of God on earth). The Horse Gate is the path by which God becomes master of our life. It is the point at which we surrender to God moment by moment, turning aside from our wicked ways and following Him. (Interestingly the term “Sur” of Sur Gate, another name for the Horse Gate, means, “turning aside” in Hebrew). This turning aside the ways of the world in favor of God's ways actuates our faith by establishing the Lordship of Jesus Christ—indeed, a Foundation Gate upon which we build our lives:

¹⁸⁷ James 1:22-24

¹⁸⁸ Nehemiah 3:28

¹⁸⁹ II Chronicles 23:1-15

*"Then Jesus said to the disciples, 'If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow me. If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life.'"*¹⁹⁰

The story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a colt is wonderfully symbolic of the Horse Gate, for in it we see all of the aforementioned components; the connection between the throne of God and the temple of God, and the intention of God to dwell in a holy temple free of idolatry:

*"...on the Mount of Olives, he [Jesus] sent two disciples ahead. 'Go into that village over there,' he told them, 'and as you enter it you will see a colt tied there that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, 'The Lord needs it.'"*¹⁹¹

We begin with the Mount of Olives, a sacred spot of activity in the Messiah's life. It was here that Jesus wept over Jerusalem,¹⁹² where He spent His most intimate times with His disciples,¹⁹³ where He took time to rest and pray,¹⁹⁴ where at the base of the mountain, in the Garden of Gethsemane, He toiled under the weight of His destiny,¹⁹⁵ where He ascended into heaven,¹⁹⁶ and finally it is at the Mount of Olives where Jesus will gloriously return to earth.¹⁹⁷

From the Mount of Olives (representing the "palace") Jesus descends into Jerusalem (representing the "temple") on a small donkey. This descent from the Mount of Olives so wonderfully symbolizes the humility of Christ and models to us the path we should likewise follow—for it wasn't a mighty steed or even a sturdy mature donkey our Savior rode on but a donkey's colt, which when ridden by a full grown man must have looked ridiculous. Indeed how silly we look to the world when we humble ourselves before God and men. The Lordship of Jesus Christ was being acted out in a most peculiar manner on that colt, and thus it is according to God's word:

*"The greatest among you must be a servant. But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*¹⁹⁸

*"Most of the crowd spread their coats on the road ahead of Jesus, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. He was in the center of the procession, and the crowds all around him were shouting, 'Praise God for the Son of David! Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Praise God in the highest heaven!'"*¹⁹⁹

When the authority of God arrives on the scene it is the natural tendency of those who await the Lord to humble themselves and worship Him. Others will scarcely notice God or His authority, and some will mock the "foolishness" of God's wisdom, yet those who call upon the Lord shall be saved! As Jesus passed by the people cried out, "Hosanna!" which translates, "Please, God, save us!" They acknowledged His Lordship and cried out for mercy, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 500 years earlier which declared:

¹⁹⁰ Matthew 16:24-25

¹⁹¹ Luke 19:29b-31

¹⁹² Luke 19:41

¹⁹³ Matthew 24

¹⁹⁴ Luke 21:50-51

¹⁹⁵ Luke 22:39-46

¹⁹⁶ Luke 24:50

¹⁹⁷ Zechariah 14:4

¹⁹⁸ Matthew 23:11-12

¹⁹⁹ Matthew 21:8-9

*“Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—even a donkey’s colt.”*²⁰⁰

The Horse Gate is that place of laying down our authority and identity in favor of the highest authority and identity—Jesus Christ.

*“But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, ‘Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!’ He replied, ‘If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!’”*²⁰¹

As Jesus enters the city with the people praising Him the Pharisees are outraged and demand that Jesus tell His followers to silence their blasphemous declaration that He is Lord. Jesus tells the Pharisees that if the people go silent the very rocks of the earth will begin declaring His lordship. Indeed the earth itself eagerly anticipates joining the redeemed children of God in freedom from death and decay.²⁰² Just as the Pharisees chided the followers of Jesus, today’s Pharisees mock God people and attempt to silence our declarations, either in word or deed, that Jesus is Lord. Yet all creation knows who is Lord, and if we don’t praise Him creation will.

*“But as they came closer to Jerusalem and Jesus saw the city ahead, he began to cry.”*²⁰³

Before the Lordship of Jesus Christ begins in our life it is God, not us, who cries first for the pitiful state of affairs on earth. We see this in John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world...”* and Romans 5:8, *“For while we were yet sinners Christ died for us...”* God’s heart is so tender toward His people—His Lordship is based on kindness, not wrath²⁰⁴—though in His wrath He ultimately rejects those who reject Him.²⁰⁵

*“Then Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out the merchants from their stalls. He told them, ‘The Scriptures declare, ‘My Temple will be place of prayer,’ but you have turned it into a den of thieves.’”*²⁰⁶

Jesus completes the journey through the symbolic Horse Gate by entering the city and going to the Temple where He directly drives out the idolatry and impurity that existed; and thus we see the consummation of the journey from the “palace” or authority of God to the “temple” or dwelling place of God. The Lordship of Jesus Christ brings a cleansing to our temple—the temple of the Holy Spirit—and like the plight of Queen Athaliah those things that give place to such impurity and idolatry must be destroyed.

The Horse Gate is the important link between the authority of God in heaven and the submission to that authority here on earth, for this is where God dwells. It is the place where the Lordship of Jesus Christ is or is not. Jesus is not “Lord” of our life by mere declaration. The term “lord” means “one having power and authority over others” and in the original Greek of the New Testament it means “he to whom a person belongs, about which he has the power of deciding, one who has control of a person.” Is Jesus really the one who has authority over us, to whom we belong like a bondservant belongs to a master, who has control over us?

²⁰⁰ Zechariah 9:9

²⁰¹ Luke 19:39-40

²⁰² Romans 8:21

²⁰³ Luke 19:41

²⁰⁴ Ephesians 2:7, Titus 3:3-4, Romans 2:4

²⁰⁵ Luke 19:42, Romans 11:22

²⁰⁶ Luke 19:45-46

For some of us Jesus is no more our Lord than the birds of the air, yet we still mistakenly insist He is Lord. In the Hebrew of the Old Testament the term “Lord” was the personal name of God, Jehovah, which was never even spoken in reverence of Him. I wonder how many of us have broken the third of the Ten Commandments:

*“Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God. The Lord will not let you go unpunished if you misuse His name.”*²⁰⁷

Beyond cursing is the misuse of His name in context of relationship: we call Him LORD when He is not. The Lordship of Christ, the incarnate authority of God, will not dwell in a temple that has been given over to the ways of the world, where His lordship is mere lip service. In essence, for God to be assured that we love and submit to Him, we must speak His “love language.” The theory of love languages, used regularly among experts in marriage and family matters, purports that each of us functions in and responds to a particular expression of love. In a marriage context, one person might respond most readily to the love language of *quality time* while another responds to *physical touch*. The important point is that we come to understand the love language of others so we can most effectively reach their heart and minister to them.²⁰⁸ For example, if I desire to bless my wife with, let’s say, a dessert, I must make a dessert *she* likes. I happen to love anything chocolate, while my wife appreciates things like lemon poppy-seed cake. If I endeavor to bless her through *my* “love language” (in this case, chocolate), rather than *her* love language (lemon poppy-seed) then I have failed to reach her heart hence express the love I originally intended.

God has a “love language” which brings about great blessing for those who speak it...**obedience:**

*“Jesus replied, ‘All those who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and live with them. Anyone who doesn’t love me will not do what I say. And remember, my words are not my own. This message is from the Father who sent me.’”*²⁰⁹

Many of us communicate our love to God through piety, exuberant worship, good deeds, or words of praise. While these things are honorable and certainly worth continuing we are told that God knows we love Him when we obey Him. If we fail to obey Him, no matter how much we tell Him we love Him with our words of praise or piety, we have failed to communicate that love. This is how some people grow bitter toward God: they assume their religious actions balance out their failure to obey Him, and when God does not bless them or respond to them they blame Him. As stated earlier in the Refuse Gate section, there is simply no better way to walk in the ways of God than to obey Him. In doing this we can with confidence say He is *Lord* and know that this lordship, while bringing death to our sinful flesh, will produce in us a far greater spiritual weight of glory than mere religiosity.²¹⁰ And for those who have cried out “Hosanna—Please, God save us!” God will most certainly make a dwelling place and produce the most heavenly of changes to the most earthen of vessels:

*“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves...”*²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Exodus 20:7

²⁰⁸ For more information on Love Languages, read The Five Love Languages by Dr. Gary Chapman.

²⁰⁹ John 14:23-24

²¹⁰ II Corinthians 4:16-18

²¹¹ II Corinthians 4:7 (NASB)

Let us therefore examine our Horse Gate and determine who or what, is Lord of our life, allowing Him to ride into our lives and cleanse us from all unrighteousness; that the glory of God would be revealed to our neighbors, family and friends.

And still there is another equine upon which our Lord will ride, another gate linked to our Savior, as we will see next.

The East Gate

(Watching for Our Soon-Coming King) ²¹²

Also called the Beautiful Gate and King's Gate, physically and spiritually this is the most magnificent of all the gates in Jerusalem. The prophecies of Ezekiel give us insight into this gate and how it relates to our future. Ezekiel describes a vision of cherubim (angels) standing at the entrance of the East Gate with the glory of the Lord over them,²¹³ a vision of twenty-five men guilty of wicked counsel in Jerusalem standing at the East Gate,²¹⁴ and a vision of the glory of God entering through the East Gate and filling the temple.²¹⁵

Ezekiel also describes the duties of a "prince" at the East Gate. This prince had sins for which he must offer sacrifices,²¹⁶ he bore sons,²¹⁷ he could not perform priestly duties,²¹⁸ he had to worship the Lord,²¹⁹ and he could not use the actual gate but had to instead offer his burnt and peace offerings through the vestibule or gateposts of the East. In addition, the East Gate, which made access from the outer court to the inner court of the temple, was closed six days a week and opened only on the 7th or Sabbath day.²²⁰

All of these prophetic visions join to form magnificent picture of humanity and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

This "prince" represents each of us, sinners, who have need for atonement of sin,²²¹ who are called to worship the Lord,²²² who are labeled as imperfect by the number six, the Biblical number of man,²²³ (the East Gate is opened only on the seventh day, the symbol of perfection, hence only Christ can enter through this gate for He alone is perfect²²⁴), we who cannot enter heaven except through the gate of Jesus Christ,²²⁵ and who need assistance moving from the outer court to the inner court of God's presence.²²⁶

²¹² Nehemiah 3:29

²¹³ Ezekiel 10:19

²¹⁴ Ezekiel 11:1-2

²¹⁵ Ezekiel 43:1-4

²¹⁶ Ezekiel 45:22

²¹⁷ Ezekiel 46:16-18

²¹⁸ Ezekiel 45:19

²¹⁹ Ezekiel 46:2

²²⁰ Ezekiel 46:12

²²¹ Romans 5:6-21

²²² I Chronicles 16:29, Psalm 95:6, Matthew 4:10, Revelation 22:9

²²³ In the creation narrative God created man and woman on the 6th day (Genesis 1:27), 6 days were allotted to man for labor (Exodus. 20:9; 23:12; 31:15; cf. Luke 13:14). A Hebrew servant had to serve for 6 years before he was freed. The number 6 is therefore closely associated with man. [From The New Bible Dictionary] The Antichrist is given the number 666 to illustrate his total depravity (Revelation 13:18) and the six seals in the sixth chapter of the Book of Revelation are symbolic of divine wrath upon sinful flesh (Revelation 6:1-17).

²²⁴ This number [seven] occurs frequently in Scripture, and in such connections as lead to the supposition that it has some typical meaning. On the seventh day God rested, and hallowed it (Genesis 2:2, 3). The division of time into weeks of seven days each accounts for many instances of the occurrence of this number. This number has been called the symbol of perfection, and also the symbol of rest. "Jacob's seven years' service to Laban; Pharaoh's seven

Furthermore, the Hebrew word “prince” in Ezekiel can be defined as both “one who is lifted up” and “a vapor”²²⁷ which we are according to Paul who tells us God will “transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory”²²⁸ and James who describes us as a “vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.”²²⁹ We are that prince whom Ezekiel saw in his vision from the Lord, who stands at the most Beautiful Gate, the King’s Gate, the East Gate, guilty of “wicked counsel” yet saved by grace and awaiting the return of our Savior:

“Suddenly, the glory of the God of Israel appeared from the east. The sound of his coming was like the roar of rushing waters, and the whole landscape shone with his glory...and I fell down before him with my face in the dust. And the glory of the Lord came into the Temple through the east gateway...” ²³⁰

We were once like the lame man in the Book of Acts lying at the East Gate, the Beautiful Gate, begging for provision...a profound picture of the lost:

“Peter and John went to the Temple one afternoon to take part in the three o’clock prayer service. As they approached the Temple, a man lame from birth was being carried in. Each day he was put beside the Temple gate, the one called the Beautiful Gate, so he could beg from the people going into the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for some money. Peter and John looked at him intently, and Peter said, ‘Look at us!’ The lame man looked at them eagerly, expecting a gift. But Peter said, ‘I don’t have any money for you. But I’ll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!’ Then Peter took the lame man by the right hand and helped him up. And as he did, the man’s feet and anklebones were healed and strengthened. He jumped up, stood on his feet, and began to walk! Then, walking, leaping, and praising God, he went into the Temple with them.” ²³¹

We were “lame from birth,” born into sin and needing healing.²³² We were brought to the Beautiful Gate, and introduced to Christ. We first looked only for physical provision, not realizing our spiritual needs. Then a Messenger of God came to us and instead of offering us the temporary things of this life offered us the gift of eternal life. He extended His hand to us in fellowship and love and by His stripes we were raised from infirmity to leaping with praise in the house of God.²³³

The East Gate represents our hope in eternal life, the anticipation of Christ’s return and the establishment of a perfect community of believers for all time. It is truly the King’s Gate, the most Beautiful Gate, for it

fat oxen and seven lean ones; the seven branches of the golden candlestick; the seven trumpets and the seven priests who sounded them; the seven days’ siege of Jericho; the seven churches, seven spirits, seven stars, seven seals, seven vials, and many others, sufficiently prove the importance of this sacred number” (see Leviticus 25:4; I Samuel 2:5; Psalms 12:6; 79:12; Proverbs 26:16; Isaiah 4:1; Matthew 18:21, 22; Luke 17:4). The feast of Passover (Exodus 12:15, 16), the feast of Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:9), of Tabernacles (16:13), and the Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8), were all ordered by seven. Seven is the number of sacrifice (II Chronicles 29:21; Job 42:8), of purification and consecration (Leviticus 4:6, 17; 8:11, 33; 14:9, 51), of forgiveness (Matthew 18:21, 22; Luke 17:4), of reward (Deuteronomy 28:7; I Samuel 2:5), and of punishment (Leviticus 26:21, 24, 28; Deuteronomy 28:25). It is used for any round number in such passages as Job 5:19; Proverbs 26:16, 25; Isaiah 4:1; Matthew 12:45. It is used also to mean “abundantly” (Genesis 4:15, 24; Leviticus 26:24; Ps. 79:12). [From Easton’s Bible Dictionary]

²²⁵ John 10:9

²²⁶ Hebrews 6:19-20, 10:19-22

²²⁷ Hebrew *nasi*: one lifted up, rising mist or vapor

²²⁸ Philippians 3:21 (NASB)

²²⁹ James 4:14 (NASB)

²³⁰ Ezekiel 43:1b-4

²³¹ Acts 3:1-8

²³² Psalm 51:5

²³³ I Peter 2:24

frames the return of the King of Kings, the Bright Morning Star, and the Prince of Peace--Jesus. We cannot hope to be a true community of believers if we are not ardently and consistently focused as watchmen on the return of our Master and Bridegroom and encouraging each other in this vigilance. For those who fall asleep, those who are unprepared, will suffer immeasurably when Christ returns:

*“Watch out! Don’t let me [Jesus] find you living in careless ease and drunkenness, and filled with the worries of this life. Don’t let that day catch you unaware, as in a trap. For that day will come upon everyone living on the earth. Keep a constant watch. And pray that, if possible, you may escape these horrors and stand before the Son of Man.”*²³⁴

Yet let us be among those who watch, who wait, who discern the times, and who one day soon walk through the East Gate into the arms of the One for whom and through whom all things were created.²³⁵ For those who are vigilant, whose eyes scan the horizon each day for the glorious return of Christ, whose lives reflect confidence in Him, these eagerly wait for His return—when the Beautiful Gate, the East Gate, indeed the King’s gate, opens on that final Sabbath, the day of completion, and eternal rest for God’s people begins (for indeed there remains a Sabbath rest for God’s people²³⁶), when the full glory of God attended by a multitude of heavenly hosts fills a temple built with the living stones of His people, with the cornerstone of Jesus Christ Himself,²³⁷ and where the beloved Psalm of David comes alive:

*“Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”*²³⁸

The Inspection Gate *(The Day of Judgment...and Eternal Glory)*²³⁹

This is the gate where Pashur, son of Immer the priest and governor of the house of the Lord, whipped Jeremiah the prophet and placed him in stocks for prophesying doom for the stiff-necked people of Jerusalem. As a result his name is changed from Pashur (Heb. *Pashuchuwr* meaning “freedom”) to Magormissabib (Heb. *Magowr mic-Cabiyb* meaning “terror on every side”).²⁴⁰ As the final gate in Nehemiah’s restoration project, the Inspection Gate represents the final divine judgment of man. The prophet Jeremiah was beaten for declaring truth—that the people had forsaken God and were in danger of divine retribution—just as Jesus was scourged for the same. The name (and destiny) of the one who beat Jeremiah was changed from freedom to inescapable terror—and such will be the case for those who defy God or his messengers. Jesus shares a parable of such action in Matthew 21:33-44 and declares:

*“What I mean is that the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation that will produce the proper fruit. Anyone who stumbles over that stone [the cornerstone of Jesus] will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.”*²⁴¹

It is this gate, also known as *Miphkad* (the place of appointment, accounting, and census), where God calls all to account in accordance with His word:

²³⁴ Luke 21:34-36

²³⁵ Colossians 1:15-23

²³⁶ Hebrews 4:9

²³⁷ I Peter 2:5-8

²³⁸ Psalm 23:6

²³⁹ Nehemiah 3:31

²⁴⁰ Jeremiah 20:1-6

²⁴¹ Matthew 21:43-44

“But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. Then the King will say to those on the right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.’

“Then these righteous ones will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?’ And the King will tell them, ‘I assure you, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’

“Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, ‘Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his demons! For I was hungry, and you didn’t feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn’t give me anything to drink. I was a stranger, and you didn’t invite me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me no clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn’t visit me.’

*“Then they will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?’ And he will answer, ‘I assure you, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life.”*²⁴²

Each of us will most certainly line up for inspection on that final day (as the word *Miphkad* means) before a holy God who will measure us on His terms and not ours. The Inspection Gate is that place that leads only to heaven or hell, without the chance for either falling from heaven or getting out of hell for the rest of time. It is a sobering place of infinite silence, where each waits to hear the just and final verdict from God, which results from our actions and beliefs on earth:

*“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed (paid back) for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”*²⁴³

And the motivation for us to preach the gospel Jesus preached is found in Paul’s next words:

*“It is because we know this solemn fear of the Lord that we work so hard to persuade others.”*²⁴⁴

Nothing will be hidden on that day. The secret thoughts and deeds of every person will be made known:

*“...on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Jesus Christ.”*²⁴⁵

*“The time is coming when everything will be revealed; all that is secret will be made public. Whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be shouted from the housetops for all to hear!”*²⁴⁶

²⁴² Matthew 25:31-46

²⁴³ II Corinthians 5:10 (NASB)

²⁴⁴ II Corinthians 5:11

²⁴⁵ Romans 2:16 (NASB)

²⁴⁶ Luke 12:1b-3

And none will escape or change God's verdict:

"Forever, O Lord, your word stands firm in heaven." ²⁴⁷

Yet what of those who have entered the Sheep Gate of salvation in Christ, who walk through the Fish Gate of forsaking the world and preaching the gospel, who stand in the Old City Gate of God's eternal covenants, who endure the Valley Gate of persecution and perfecting trials, who walk in the purity of the Refuse Gate, who have the rivers of the Spirit flowing from them like the Fountain Gate, who act according to the Water Gate of God's word, who submit themselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ at the Horse Gate, and who eagerly await the return of their King at the East Gate? What will the Inspection Gate mean to them?

"I assure you, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death to life." ²⁴⁸

"So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Jesus Christ from the power of sin that leads to death." ²⁴⁹

"You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins. He cancelled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross." ²⁵⁰

"And he said to him, 'Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.'" ²⁵¹

"And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his glorious return." ²⁵²

"And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." ²⁵³

"God blesses the people who patiently endure testing. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him." ²⁵⁴

"...well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'" ²⁵⁵

It is the Inspection Gate through which Jehoida the priest escorted the new King of Judah, Joash, following the overthrow of wicked Queen Athaliah. Then, witnessed by all of Jerusalem, Joash sat upon the royal throne of Judah.²⁵⁶ There is coming a day, very soon, when the Lion of Judah will sit upon the

²⁴⁷ Psalm 199:89

²⁴⁸ John 5:24

²⁴⁹ Romans 8:1-2

²⁵⁰ Colossians 2:13-14

²⁵¹ Luke 22:43 (NASB)

²⁵² II Timothy 4:8

²⁵³ I Peter 5:4 (NASB)

²⁵⁴ James 1:12

²⁵⁵ Matthew 25:23

²⁵⁶ See Horse Gate section for more details. It's also interesting to note that Joash was seven years old when he assumed the throne and he did so in the seventh year of King Jehu's reign in Israel. See footnote #224 for more details on the Biblical reference to the number seven.

royal throne, witnessed by all creation, having overthrown the enemy of our souls...and every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that He, Jesus Christ, is LORD!

Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly.

Pastor Rick Allen
Crossroads Christian Fellowship