

The Gates of Zion

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Introduction

Gates provided access to the city of Jerusalem and the Temple mount. The names of these gates often reflected their location and usage. Keeping these names straight is complicated because the walls of Jerusalem changed over time – expanding in times of prosperity and shrinking after periods of deprivation. When the walls and gates of Jerusalem were rebuilt, they were often identified by different names.

In the Old Testament, one reads of Benjamin’s Gate, the Beautiful Gate, the Corner Gate, the East Gate, the First Gate, the Fish Gate, the Fountain Gate, the Gate of Ephraim, the Gate of Foundation, the Gate of Joshua, the Horse Gate, the King’s Gate, the Middle Gate, the Miphkad Gate, the New Gate, the North Gate, the Old Gate, the Potsherd Gate, the Prison Gate, the Refuse Gate, the Shallecheth Gate, the Sheep Gate, the South Gate, the Upper Gate, the Valley Gate, the Water Gate, the West Gate, etc. The New Testament refers to the Sheep Gate (John 5:2) and the Beautiful Gate of the Temple (Acts 3:10).

John 5:1-4 (NASB95) — 1 After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. 3 In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, [waiting for the moving of the waters; 4 for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.]

Acts 3:1-10 (NASB95) — 1 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. 2 And a man who had been lame from his mother’s womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. 4 But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, “Look at us!” 5 And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. 6 But Peter said, “I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!” 7 And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. 8 With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. 9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God; 10 and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Physical Significance

Protection and Peace

The physical gates of a city afforded protection and peace (Josh. 2:1-7; 6:1-2; Psa. 127:1; 107:16; 147:13).

Joshua 2:1-7 (NASB95) — 1 Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there. 2 It was told the king of Jericho, saying, “Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.” 3 And the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land.” 4 But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, “Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. 5 “It came about when it was time to shut the gate at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them.” 6 But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof. 7 So the men pursued them on the road to the Jordan to the fords; and as soon as those who were pursuing them had gone out, they shut the gate.

Joshua 6:1-2 (NASB95) — 1 Now Jericho was tightly shut because of the sons of Israel; no one went out and no one came in. 2 The Lord said to Joshua, “See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and the valiant warriors.

Psalm 127:1 (NASB95) — 1 Unless the Lord builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain.

*Psalm 107:16 (NASB95) — 16 For **He has shattered gates of bronze** and cut bars of iron asunder.*

*Psalm 147:13 (NASB95) — 13 For **He has strengthened the bars of your gates**; He has blessed your sons within you.*

Assembly and Association

Physical gates of a city were also a place of assembly and association (Ruth 4:1-12; cf. Deut. 25:5-10).

Ruth 4:1-12 (NASB95) — 1 Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there, and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz spoke was passing by, so he said, “Turn aside, friend, sit down here.” And he turned aside and sat down. 2 He took ten men of the elders of the city and said, “Sit down here.” So they sat down. 3 Then he said to the closest relative, “Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, has to sell the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. 4 “So I thought to inform you, saying, ‘Buy it before those who are sitting here, and before the elders of my people. If you will redeem

it, redeem it; but if not, tell me that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am after you.’ ” And he said, “I will redeem it.” 5 Then Boaz said, “On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance.” 6 The closest relative said, “I cannot redeem it for myself, because I would jeopardize my own inheritance. Redeem it for yourself; you may have my right of redemption, for I cannot redeem it.” 7 Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning the redemption and the exchange of land to confirm any matter: a man removed his sandal and gave it to another; and this was the manner of attestation in Israel. 8 So the closest relative said to Boaz, “Buy it for yourself.” And he removed his sandal. 9 Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You are witnesses today that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. 10 “Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birth place; you are witnesses today.” 11 All the people who were in the court, and the elders, said, “We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel; and may you achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem. 12 “Moreover, may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah, through the offspring which the Lord will give you by this young woman.”

Deuteronomy 25:5-10 (NASB95) — 5 “When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her. 6 “It shall be that the firstborn whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel. 7 “But if the man does not desire to take his brother’s wife, then his brother’s wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, ‘My husband’s brother refuses to establish a name for his brother in Israel; he is not willing to perform the duty of a husband’s brother to me.’ 8 “Then the elders of his city shall summon him and speak to him. And if he persists and says, ‘I do not desire to take her,’ 9 then his brother’s wife shall come to him in the sight of the elders, and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face; and she shall declare, ‘Thus it is done to the man who does not build up his brother’s house.’ 10 “In Israel his name shall be called, ‘The house of him whose sandal is removed.’

Spiritual Significance

Protection and Peace

The gates of spiritual Zion provide protection and peace (Psa. 122:1-9; 147:12-20).

Psalm 122:1-9 (NASB95) — 1 I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord.” 2 Our feet are standing Within your gates, O Jerusalem, 3 Jerusalem, that is built As a city that is compact together; 4 To which the tribes go up, even the tribes of the

Lord— An ordinance for Israel— To give thanks to the name of the Lord. 5 For there thrones were set for judgment, The thrones of the house of David. 6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: “May they prosper who love you. 7 “May peace be within your walls, And prosperity within your palaces.” 8 For the sake of my brothers and my friends, I will now say, “May peace be within you.” 9 For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.

Psalm 147:12-20 (NASB95) — 12 Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! 13 For He has strengthened the bars of your gates; He has blessed your sons within you. 14 He makes peace in your borders; He satisfies you with the finest of the wheat. 15 He sends forth His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly. 16 He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes. 17 He casts forth His ice as fragments; Who can stand before His cold? 18 He sends forth His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow. 19 He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel. 20 He has not dealt thus with any nation; And as for His ordinances, they have not known them. Praise the Lord!

Assembly and Association

The gates of spiritual Zion are also a place of assembly and association (Psa. 100:1-5; 118:15-29).

Psalm 100:1-5 (NASB95) — 1 Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth. 2 Serve the Lord with gladness; Come before Him with joyful singing. 3 Know that the Lord Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. 4 Enter His gates with thanksgiving And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name. 5 For the Lord is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting And His faithfulness to all generations.

Psalm 118:15-29 (NASB95) — 15 The sound of joyful shouting and salvation is in the tents of the righteous; The right hand of the Lord does valiantly. 16 The right hand of the Lord is exalted; The right hand of the Lord does valiantly. 17 I will not die, but live, And tell of the works of the Lord. 18 The Lord has disciplined me severely, But He has not given me over to death. 19 Open to me the gates of righteousness; I shall enter through them, I shall give thanks to the Lord. 20 This is the gate of the Lord; The righteous will enter through it. 21 I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me, And You have become my salvation. 22 The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone. 23 This is the Lord’s doing; It is marvelous in our eyes. 24 This is the day which the Lord has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it. 25 O Lord, do save, we beseech You; O Lord, we beseech You, do send prosperity! 26 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord; We have blessed you from the house of the Lord. 27 The Lord is God, and He has given us light; Bind the festival sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. 28 You are my God, and I give thanks to You; You are my God, I extol You. 29 Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting.

Conclusion

In Psalms 87, the sons of Korah exclaimed, “The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the other dwelling places of Jacob” (Psa. 87:1-7).

Psalm 87:1-7 (NASB95) — 1 His foundation is in the holy mountains. 2 The Lord loves the gates of Zion More than all the other dwelling places of Jacob. 3 Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God. Selah. 4 “I shall mention Rahab and Babylon among those who know Me; Behold, Philistia and Tyre with Ethiopia: ‘This one was born there.’ ” 5 But of Zion it shall be said, “This one and that one were born in her”; And the Most High Himself will establish her. 6 The Lord will count when He registers the peoples, “This one was born there.” Selah. 7 Then those who sing as well as those who play the flutes shall say, “All my springs of joy are in you.”

Affirming the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old, the writer of Hebrew said, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven...” (Heb. 12:18-24).

Hebrews 12:18-24 (NASB95) — 18 For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, 19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. 20 For they could not bear the command, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned.” 21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, “I am full of fear and trembling.” 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

Have you entered the gates of spiritual Zion? Enjoy the protection and peace that belong to citizens of the city of God. Share in the blessings of assembly and association that belong to members of the Lord’s church. Render obedience to the gospel of Christ while there is time and opportunity.