

LIFE OUTSIDE THE HOME CITIES

The last series in *Bible Customs and Culture* concentrated on life in the home. This year, we will see what there is to see on the outside. When we leave the confines of house and family, we notice people engaged in a wide variety of tasks. There are fishermen, musicians, and shepherds all around. How do they go about their work? What is it like to travel from place to place and how are the people dressed? Let's go on a journey together . . .

Into Town

Today, we walk into town. Look around and see what a city in Bible times was like!

Walls A person might first notice the walls that surrounded a larger city. The walls protected the residents from enemy attack and so were the most important part of the city. The walls in Jericho were about 6 feet thick and about 30 feet high. Watchmen would stand on top of the wall and look out for approaching enemies. If an enemy broke through the wall or managed to get over it, the city was doomed.

Gates In the walls, there are gates to allow traffic in and out of the city. The gates would be made of a solid material like wood or stone. Sometimes, they would be covered with metal for extra protection and reinforced with heavy locks or bars. The gate areas

STUDY THE SCRIPTURE

Read Isaiah 26:1.
What is the "wall" in this Bible verse? How does this "wall" protect us?

Read Ezekiel 33:1-9.
How important was the job of the watchman? What happened if the watchman failed to warn of the enemy?

STUDY THE SCRIPTURE

What is the symbolism of the city gates mentioned in the following passages:

Gen 22:7
Rev 21:25

became popular meeting places and were often very busy. Consider these things that took place at the gate: [1] **Justice** is carried out at the gate (Dt 21:19-21). [2] **Protection** was found at the gate (Josh 20:1-4). [3] **Trade** at the gate (2 Kgs 7:1). [4] **Prophecy** at the gate (1 Kings 22:10). [5] **Prayer** at the gate (Esth 4:1-3). [6] **Praise** at the gate. [7] **Teaching** at the gate (Neh 8:1).

Throughout the Bible, the gates of the city of Jerusalem are mentioned frequently. Tradition records that on Palm Sunday Jesus entered Jerusalem by the east gate (today called the Golden Gate, picture at right).



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When Jerusalem was rebuilt under Nehemiah after the Babylonian Captivity, the rebuilding of the gates was one of the first projects (Neh 3:1ff). Today, there are eight main gates leading into old Jerusalem.

Market Place Near the gate areas, your walk through a Bible city will reveal the market places. Markets were open every weekday and many people bought food every day since they had no way of keeping it stored. The market, however, was not just a place for buying food and goods, but it was a place for social gathering. Jesus warned His disciples of the scribes which loved to go around in the marketplaces (Mk 12:38). When the Apostle Paul wanted to speak to the people of Athens, he went straight to the marketplace (Ac 17:17). The market area became a play yard for children as well, and Jesus referred to the children when he denounced Jerusalem for not listening to His word (Mt 11:16-17).

If a man was looking for work, he would come to the market in order to find a job (Mt 20:3). Employers would come there looking for workers.

City Streets When we think of city streets, we think of paved highways with painted lined and sidewalks, but as you walk around your Bible city, you do not see much that looks like this.

STUDY THE SCRIPTURE

What does Jesus say about the Pharisees who prayed in the streets?

Matthew 6:5

Streets were very narrow and usually people would walk in single file along them. They would wind along in rather haphazard patterns. Very often they were not paved and so when it rained they would become muddy messes. If they were “paved,” that usually meant simply strewn with rough stones.

The streets were very public areas similar to the marketplaces. In fact, in larger towns the markets would spill over into several streets each with particular wares such as “baker’s street.” In Greek and Roman towns, the streets were in better condition.

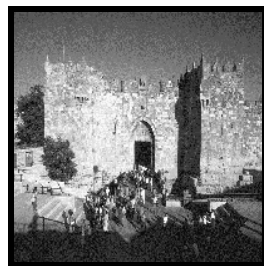
At night, the city street can be very dangerous. The narrow passageways and many corners allow bandits and robbers to hide. Wild dogs roamed the streets at night as well as the prostitutes.

Towers

Finally, walking around the walls, streets, marketplaces, and gates, you cannot help but notice the towers of the city. A tower was a point where the wall was built higher. Sometimes watchmen would stand on the towers. Weapons could be thrown from the towers as well. There was generally a tower built at each gate and sometimes towers where the city wall turned a corner as well.

The Fortress

Sometimes a city would have a fortress (Judges 9:46). The fortress would be in a central location usually up on a hill so people in the fortress could see out over the wall. From the fortress, weapons could be directed at an enemy. There was no safer place in the city than the fortress. Consider that God is our fortress (Ps 18:2; 46:11).



Wight

City Gate

The *Damascus Gate* is the main entrance to the old city of Jerusalem (*Wight*)

The Cities of God and the City of God

There are many cities mentioned in the Bible. Some of them have long since been destroyed, while others are still standing. Who can forget Jericho whose walls came tumbling down at the sound of Joshua’s trumpets? There were the cities of Bethel and Dan where the golden calves of idol worship were set up by Jeroboam, the wicked king of Israel. There were also the towns of Jesus’ day like Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Bethlehem. There were the towns of Paul’s missionary journeys: Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and others. Archeologists are continually unearthing more of the ancient Biblical cities so we can learn more about them.

But of all the cities, the one that stands out above them all is Jerusalem, the city of David. Here king David and his son Solomon reigned in the Old Testament. Here was the city that Jesus so earnestly tried to convert with His saving gospel. He came with forgiveness of sins, and unfortunately Jerusalem rejected Him. He came wanting to gather these people to Himself and they would not. It is the city where Jesus died and rose again from the dead. The city of Jerusalem became the emblem of God Himself and all that He had done to preserve and protect His people.

There are other names for Jerusalem in the Bible. It is commonly called *Zion* or *Mount Zion*. Figuratively, Jerusalem is used to picture believers in Christ and in the book of Revelation, the *New Jerusalem* represents heaven. Heaven is the greatest “city” of God, a place which by His grace and Jesus’ merciful suffering and death, we will all enjoy.

Resources

- # www.inholyland.net
- # *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*, Fred Wight
- # *Bible Times and Customs*, Tim Gibson