

BETWEEN THE GATES

*The Christian Life from
Pentecost to the Return of Christ*

VOLUME I

The Gates We Enter

*The First Five Gates
of Nehemiah*

*"Stand at the crossroads and look;
ask for the ancient paths"*

— JEREMIAH 6:16



PENTECOST
THE SPIRIT
COMES



THE WORD
THE FOUNDATION
IS LAID



THE GATES
WE ENTER AND
WE BUILD



THE KING
WE SERVE AND
WE SUFFER



THE RETURN
THE HOPE WE
HOLD

A FOUR-VOLUME SERIES

Between the Gates

Volume I

The Gates We Enter

From Conversion to the Cleansing That Follows It

Bobby Joseph

Between the Gates, Volume I: The Gates We Enter

The Christian Life from Pentecost to the Return of Christ

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References to the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in the days of Nehemiah draw on the text of Nehemiah 3 and on a long tradition of Christian teaching that has read the ten gates of the city as a figure of the believer's journey from conversion to consummation. No specific modern source is quoted or reproduced.

This series is offered as a companion to *The Geography of Redemption* and *The Torah Blueprint*. Where those series trace the pattern of Scripture from creation to the cross, *Between the Gates* follows the pattern from Pentecost to the return of Christ.

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Preface

“Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.” — Proverbs 24:3–4

In his teaching on this passage, Brother Zac Poonen draws our attention to a truth that has shaped everything I have tried to write across three series: wisdom must come before knowledge. And wisdom, Scripture reminds us, begins with the fear of the Lord.

That sequence is not incidental. It is architectural. A house built on knowledge alone, without wisdom, is a house without a foundation. The rooms may be filled with remarkable things, but the structure cannot stand. The same danger that threatens the student of Old Testament typology threatens the student of New Testament practice. It is entirely possible to accumulate biblical insight about the Christian life, about conversion and witness and sanctification and spiritual warfare, and, in the accumulating, never grow in the fear of God. When knowledge becomes an end in itself, divorced from reverence and surrender, we are, in a very real sense, still reaching for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We are gathering information about how Christians are supposed to live while keeping the Lord at a comfortable distance.

My hope, and my earnest prayer, is that those who read this volume would grow not merely in what they know about the early Christian life, but in how they stand before the One who gave them the life they are learning to live. The fear I have in

mind is not a cowering dread, but the healthy, reverent awareness that God our Father is not indifferent to our attitudes and actions, that we are capable of dishonoring His name, and that this should matter deeply to us. That fear, rightly understood, is not the enemy of love. It is love's most sobering and stabilizing companion.

The connections, patterns, and theological observations offered here are not meant to impress. Clever observations can become their own form of pride, and the Christian life is not a subject one can master from the outside. What I hope these pages produce is a deeper devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ, a clearer dependence on the Holy Spirit whom He sent, and a more trembling, tender walk with the Father who called us home.

This volume is not a substitute for daily, deep, personal study of God's Word. Nothing should be. It is designed to supplement and complement your reading of Scripture. It is also designed to be read in the company of a local church, under the care of faithful shepherds, in the fellowship of fellow believers who can test everything and hold fast what is good. If these pages drive you back to your Bible and back to your church with fresh eyes and a more reverent heart, they will have accomplished everything I intended.

May the Lord use these pages to build something in you that knowledge alone never could.

Note to the Reader

This is the first volume of *Between the Gates*, a four-volume series on the Christian life between Pentecost and the return of Christ. It is designed to be read alongside two earlier series. *The Geography of Redemption* traces the exile-journey-return pattern through Scripture from Eden to the Babylonian return. *The Torah Blueprint* traces how the four Gospels use the five books of Moses as a structural and theological template for presenting Jesus Christ. Together those series walk the road of redemption from creation to the cross. *Between the Gates* picks up where they leave off and walks the stretch of road that the church has been walking ever since.

The image that gives the series its name comes from the third chapter of the book of Nehemiah. When the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt after the Babylonian exile, ten gates were restored in sequence, each named, each identified with a section of the wall, each assigned to particular families and guilds. Read as history, Nehemiah 3 is a careful record of a civic project. Read theologically, and in the company of the wider witness of Scripture, the ten gates trace the shape of a Christian life. The first three are the gates of entrance. The next two are the gates of refinement. The sixth is the gate of the Spirit. The seventh is the gate of the Word. The eighth is the gate of warfare. The ninth and tenth are the gates of hope and final accountability. Every believer reading this sentence has entered at the Sheep Gate and is walking toward the Muster Gate. The question the series tries to answer is what it means to walk well between them.

Volume One walks the first five gates. The first three are the gates of entrance. The fourth and fifth are the gates of refinement. Taken together they describe what it means to become a Christian and to be shaped by the work that conversion sets in motion. The sixth gate, which is the gate of the Spirit, begins Volume Two, because what happens there is large enough to require a volume of its own. Volumes Three and Four complete the journey.

Three biblical languages run through the whole series, and you will hear them across this volume. Geography is the language of location and direction, of exile and return, of the road every Christian is walking in spiritual terms. Mathematics is the language of pattern and recurrence, of the numbers and shapes that reveal that the road was designed. Pneumatology is the language of the Holy Spirit, who indwells the traveler and makes the walk possible. Each volume leans harder on one than the others. Volume One leans on geography, because the first five gates are, above all, the gates through which a soul is led out of exile and into fellowship with the God who built the city.

A word about how each station is structured. Every one of the five stations in this volume begins with a verse from Nehemiah 3 that locates the gate on the wall. It then asks what the gate meant in the history of Jerusalem, what the gate reveals about Christ, and what the gate demands of the believer who is passing through it. Every station ends with a short paragraph I have labeled Christ at the Gate, in which the whole station is gathered into its Christological center. This is the same device I used in *Geography of Redemption* under the name *New Covenant Destination*. Its purpose is the same. The

gate is not finally about the believer. It is about the One who became the gate.

A Personal Note

My own journey with these themes has unfolded over nearly two decades. For close to twenty years, I have studied under Mark Lanier in his Biblical Literacy class at Champion Forest Baptist Church. That class, rich in languages, archaeology, legal method, historical background, and careful exposition, became my functional seminary. Mark's approach to Scripture as serious evidence to be examined with intellectual rigor and personal humility shaped everything I have written across three series now, and it shapes this one too.

For twenty-six years I have preached monthly at Houston's Open Door Mission. Sitting with men who know homelessness, addiction, and estrangement has kept every theological claim I make pressed against human experience. When I write about conversion, I am writing about men I have watched walk from the Sheep Gate into the life of the church. When I write about sanctification, I am writing about men I have watched struggle, fall, get up, and keep walking. When I write about the Valley Gate, the gate of humiliation, I am writing about men whose faces I will see again the next time I stand behind that pulpit. Their voices are in my mind as I write, and I have never written a page for an audience I could not imagine sitting in that mission chapel with a Bible on their knees.

My theological education came through voracious reading across traditions. The Reformed precision of R.C. Sproul and John MacArthur. The comprehensive biblical overview of David Pawson. The expository faithfulness of Chuck Smith and Chuck Swindoll. The biblical-theological insights of N.T.

Wright. The devotional depth of Andrew Murray, Zac Poonen, and Watchman Nee. The imaginative apologetics of C.S. Lewis. The timeless preaching of Charles Spurgeon. Where these writers disagree, I have done my best to weigh the disagreements honestly rather than paper over them. I write as a layperson for laypeople, intelligent believers who want to go deeper without needing seminary background.

My own theological posture is Biblical and Evangelical without attachment to a single system. On the questions over which faithful Christians have long disagreed, I hold tensions rather than commit to one side. On election and human response I hold both. On perseverance and warning I hold both. On the timing of the Lord's return I hold what the creeds held long before the schools broke apart. This volume is not the place where those tensions are worked out in detail. It is the place where the reader is welcomed onto the road that runs between the gates, and the disagreements that attend the later stations are left for the volumes in which those stations appear.

This is not an academic project. I have known my own seasons on the long road between the gates. I have known what it means to be newly converted, uncertain, and afraid. I have known the Valley Gate, where self-sufficiency is broken down and pride is humbled. I have known the Dung Gate, where the Spirit will not let me rest with sin I have been carrying for years. This volume is, in that sense, both study and testimony. The road between the gates is not just the pattern of the church's life across the centuries. It is the road I am on, and the road every reader of this book is on. The map really is the message.

May the Lord meet you at the first gate.

Bobby Joseph
Houston, 2026

Introduction

The Wall and the Gates

“We have a strong city; he sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks.” — Isaiah 26:1

The year was four hundred and forty-five before the Christian era. Jerusalem lay in ruins. The walls that had once protected the city where Yahweh had placed his name were heaps of rubble, and the gates had been consumed by fire. For nearly a century and a half the Jewish people had lived under the shame of it. The temple had been rebuilt. The priesthood had been restored. The sacrifices had resumed. But the walls around the city were still broken, and a city with broken walls is not a city. It is a rubble field with a temple in the middle of it.

One man carried the shame of the walls harder than most. His name was Nehemiah. He was a layman. He was an exile who had never seen Jerusalem. He was the cupbearer to the Persian king Artaxerxes, a position of considerable trust that kept him comfortably placed in the royal court at Susa. When his brother Hanani came back from Jerusalem with a report on the condition of the remnant and the walls, Nehemiah did not immediately begin organizing. He wept. He sat down and mourned and fasted and prayed for days. The book of Nehemiah opens with a man weeping over a city he has never lived in, and it does so because the weeping is the beginning of everything else. The walls were not rebuilt by ambition. They were rebuilt by a man who grieved them first.

When the king eventually noticed Nehemiah's sadness and asked what was wrong, Nehemiah answered with a prayer he did not speak aloud and then with words he said out loud. He asked to be sent to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of his fathers' city. The king granted his request, and in the late summer of that year Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem with letters of authorization and a royal escort. He did not announce his plans. He waited three days, then rode out by night along the broken walls to see for himself what needed to be done. The silence of those three days and the slow survey of the ruins by moonlight tell a reader everything about the kind of leader Nehemiah was going to be. He looked before he spoke. He mourned before he moved.

The walls were rebuilt in fifty-two days. It was a number the enemies of the work recognized as impossible. When Sanballat and Tobiah and the rest of the hostile coalition heard that the walls were finished and no breach remained in them, though they had not yet set the doors in the gates, they perceived, as the text puts it, that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God (Nehemiah 6:16). The fifty-two days were not a human achievement. A century and a half of broken walls closed in seven and a half weeks because God rebuilt what he had allowed to be broken, and the rebuilding was always going to be his work through human hands and not human work with divine assistance.

The Hidden Architecture of Chapter Three

Inside that larger story sits the third chapter of the book. At first reading Nehemiah 3 appears to be the most tedious chapter in a book not otherwise known for being tedious. It

lists the men who rebuilt each section of the wall, the gates they reconstructed, the towers they repaired, the portions of the wall assigned to each family. It reads like a construction log. But embedded in the order of the ten gates is a theological sequence that Christian teachers have recognized for centuries, and once it has been seen it cannot be unseen.

The gates are listed in a particular order, and the order is not the order of a man walking around the city clockwise or counterclockwise. It is the order of a man walking through a life. The Sheep Gate comes first, because before anything else the soul must enter through the lamb's blood. The Fish Gate follows, because once a soul has been caught by the gospel it begins to catch others. The Old Gate follows, because the new believer who has become a witness must be anchored in the old paths, the ancient truths that have held the church upright for two thousand years. The Valley Gate comes fourth, because the believer who has learned to witness and has learned the truth is then led into the valley of humiliation, the place where self-sufficiency is broken and the soul is taught that it cannot carry its own weight. The Dung Gate is fifth, because the humbled soul is then cleansed of what humility has exposed.

Five gates have already passed, and the believer has only just arrived at the point where the Spirit can fill him in a way that produces something. The Fountain Gate is sixth. The Water Gate is seventh. The Horse Gate is eighth. The East Gate is ninth. The Muster Gate is tenth. The whole sequence traces a life from its first moment of believing to its final accounting. No gate can be skipped. No gate can be reversed. A believer who has not passed the Sheep Gate has not begun. A believer

who has not passed the Valley Gate cannot be filled with the Spirit in the way the Fountain Gate intends, because there is too much of himself in the way. A believer who has passed the Water Gate and received the Word must eventually pass the Horse Gate, because the Word received will be contested, and the one who has heard the truth will have to fight for it. The order is the order of the life. The architect of the wall was not Nehemiah. The architect was the one who designed the life in the first place.

Ezra and Nehemiah, Word and Wall

The gates stand between two earlier movements of restoration that together form the post-exilic pattern. Ezra came first, with the Word. Nehemiah came second, with the wall. Ezra was a priest and a scribe. He brought the Law back to a people who had forgotten how to read it, and he led the reformation that followed from the reading. Nehemiah was a layman and a builder. He brought the structure that protected the worship, and he led the construction that followed from the planning. The two men embody a principle that will recur at every gate in this series. You cannot have lasting spiritual renewal without practical protection, and you cannot maintain practical structures without a spiritual foundation. The temple had been rebuilt before Ezra arrived. The walls were rebuilt after Nehemiah arrived. Word and wall, internal transformation and external protection, are not alternatives. They are partners.

The climactic scene of the whole book comes in Nehemiah 8, when the walls have been finished and the people gather at the Water Gate and Ezra reads the Law aloud from early morning

until midday. Nehemiah the governor and Ezra the priest stand together at the Water Gate, and the Word is read in the presence of the wall. That scene is the point toward which the whole book has been moving. A city with a rebuilt wall but no read Word is a monument to human effort. A read Word without a rebuilt wall is an exposed people waiting to be scattered again. Together they are what the post-exilic community was meant to become, and what every Christian community in every age is meant to become. The gates are the doors in the wall that the Word read aloud made worth defending.

Christ as Wall and Gate

Before the believer walks through the first gate, a word must be said about the one whom every gate is finally about. The wall of Jerusalem was never an end in itself. Isaiah prophesied of a city whose walls would be called Salvation and whose gates would be called Praise (Isaiah 60:18). Jesus would later stand before his own disciples and say, I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved (John 10:9). He is the wall around the city. He is the door in the wall. He is the gate through which every soul enters, and he is the one who defends every soul who has entered.

Every gate in the ten therefore points to him before it points to anything else. The Sheep Gate is about him because he is the Lamb. The Fish Gate is about him because he is the one who made fishermen into apostles. The Old Gate is about him because he is the Ancient of Days, the one who was before Abraham was. The Valley Gate is about him because he descended into the valley of humiliation deeper than any of us

ever will. The Dung Gate is about him because he went outside the camp, to the place of refuse, bearing the sin of the world. And the five gates that follow in Volume Two and beyond are all about him for the same reason. The believer walking between the gates is not primarily being shaped into a better version of himself. He is being conformed to the image of the one who walked every one of these gates first.

Before We Begin

One last matter, before we arrive at the first gate. Every believer reading this book is somewhere on the wall already. None of us begins at the Sheep Gate in the sense that we have not yet believed. If you have entered at all, you have entered there. The gates after the first are not gates you pass once. They are gates you pass and re-pass, dwell at, return to, and sometimes find yourself standing before again years after you thought you had passed them for good. The Valley Gate will not close behind you forever. The Dung Gate is a gate you will walk through more times than you can count. Humility is the work of a lifetime. So is the cleansing of the heart.

That is not a failure of the pattern. It is the pattern. The walls of Jerusalem did not stay intact once they were rebuilt. They would be broken again, and rebuilt again, and broken again, because the story the walls tell is a story that only ends when Christ returns and the city itself comes down out of heaven new. Until then, the gates do not simplify. They repeat. And the believer who expects to pass each gate once and be done has not yet understood what kind of road he is on.

So the invitation of this volume is modest. Come and see where you are on the wall. Walk slowly. Let each gate do the

work it is meant to do. Do not rush toward the ones you have not yet reached. Do not despise the ones you thought you had already passed. The God who designed the sequence is patient, and he has time for you to learn it.

The walls are ready. The gates have been opened by the one who built them. The journey begins at the Sheep Gate, where the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world.

Prologue

The Rubble of Jerusalem

*“The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.” —
Nehemiah 1:3*

Before the first gate, there is the rubble.

This is the part of the story most readers skip past on the way to the gates. The interesting material is up ahead. The Sheep Gate has the Lamb in it. The Fish Gate has the Great Commission in it. Nobody leafs through a Christian book to find a chapter about a man sitting down and weeping over broken walls. But the gates do not make sense without the rubble, because the gates are what God does in the rubble, and a reader who has not sat at the rubble will not understand why God bothered to rebuild.

So this prologue sits where it sits. Before the gates, there is a ruined wall. Before the wall is rebuilt, there is a man who weeps over it. Before the weeping is the long century in which no one wept. And before that is the original reason the walls came down, which runs all the way back past Babylon to the garden, to the cherubim and the flaming sword and the first eastward exile. The gates of Nehemiah 3 were built on a site that had been a ruin for one hundred and forty-one years, and the reason it had been a ruin reaches back further than that. To walk into the first gate without acknowledging the rubble

is to walk into the gospel without acknowledging why the gospel was needed.

The Shape of the Ruin

The book of Nehemiah opens in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes. Nehemiah is in Susa, the winter capital of the Persian empire, serving in the palace as cupbearer to the king. His brother Hanani arrives from Judah with certain men, and Nehemiah asks them how the Jews who had returned from captivity were doing and how the city of Jerusalem was doing. The answer is the sentence that launches the book. The remnant is in great trouble and shame. The wall is broken down. The gates are destroyed by fire.

There are three pieces in that report, and each one matters. The people are in trouble and shame. The wall is broken. The gates are burned. Trouble in the people, brokenness in the wall, fire in the gates. A community without protection, a boundary that does not hold, and entrances that cannot be closed. Anyone who has entered the pastoral care of a congregation for any length of time has seen all three at once. A believer who has lost the wall does not keep the gates. A believer whose gates are burned does not keep the people inside safe. The three are one piece of news, and Nehemiah hears it as one piece of news, and he weeps.

The weeping is the first action of the book. Not a plan. Not a memo to the king. Not an analysis of construction materials. A man sits down in the middle of his day in a foreign city and mourns. The text is careful to tell us how long. For some days I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven (Nehemiah 1:4). Days, not hours. The weeping is sustained.

Nehemiah does not weep for an afternoon and then move on. He lingers at the brokenness until he has sat with it long enough for the grief to become a prayer.

There is something here that every Christian has to learn sooner or later, because the Christian life is lived at the edge of a great deal of brokenness. There is brokenness in the world, brokenness in the church, and brokenness in every one of us. A believer who has not learned to sit down and weep over broken walls will not be given the job of rebuilding them. The Lord does not usually hand ruined cities to the cheerful. He hands them to the mourners. Jesus said, Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Matthew 5:4), and he meant it in a way far deeper than funerals. The first beatitude of the sorrowing heart is the comfort that comes when mourning turns into prayer and prayer turns into action and action turns into a wall being rebuilt in fifty-two days.

The Prayer in the Rubble

Nehemiah's prayer in chapter one is worth reading slowly. It is one of the most careful prayers in Scripture, and it begins by remembering who God is before it says anything about what Jerusalem needs. O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments (Nehemiah 1:5). That is the first sentence. The greatness of God comes first. The covenant love of God comes next. Nehemiah does not ask for anything until he has confessed who God is, and he does not confess who God is in generalities. He confesses him in the specific language of covenant, because covenant is the

only basis on which Jerusalem's rubble can be addressed at all.

Then the confession. We have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against you. We have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses (Nehemiah 1:6–7). This is a man who has not personally torn down the walls of Jerusalem. He was born in exile. He has served faithfully in the Persian court for decades. He has every right to speak of the sin as theirs. He does not. He speaks of it as ours, and he includes himself in it. This is the posture that gets walls rebuilt. The one who can distinguish himself from the sinners does not usually get to help the sinners. The one who can say we has already begun to do the work.

Only after the remembering and the confessing does the request come. Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them (Nehemiah 1:8–9). Nehemiah is asking God to do what God has already promised to do. He is not asking for new revelation. He is asking for the old revelation to become experience. That is almost always what the Christian is asking for at the rubble. The promises are already there. The question is whether we will stand on them long enough for God to honor them in the places we can see.

Why the Rubble Matters for the Gates

The gates of Nehemiah 3 are going to be built on this ground. The Sheep Gate is not built in a pristine location. It is built where a gate used to stand before the Babylonians burned it. The Fish Gate is raised over the charred remains of the fish gate that had been there before. The Valley Gate is reconstructed where the earlier valley gate had been reduced to rubble. Nothing about the new wall is built on virgin ground. Everything about it is built on the site of a previous failure. The entire project of Nehemiah 3 is a restoration, not a construction. It is what God does where things have gone wrong.

The Christian life is like that too. No Christian begins at the Sheep Gate as a pristine soul who has never been exiled. Every Christian begins at the Sheep Gate as an exile who is being brought home. The rubble is not an embarrassing prehistory that the gospel has to overcome before the real story starts. The rubble is what the gospel is for. Before you entered the Sheep Gate, you had burned gates of your own. Your wall had breaches in it. Your internal Jerusalem was a rubble field, and whether you had a temple in the middle of it or not, the city was not a city because the wall could not hold.

This is why the Prologue sits before the gates. It asks every reader, before walking into the first gate, to sit for a moment at the rubble. Not to wallow in guilt. Not to revisit trauma that has already been addressed. Simply to remember, honestly, that the wall was broken. That there was a reason the wall was broken. That the rebuilding about to begin is not an upgrade of a functioning wall but a reconstruction over ashes. The humility of the Christian life has to start here. Without it, the gospel sounds like a decoration. With it, the gospel sounds like

the only thing that could possibly matter, because anything less than God rebuilding the wall from the rubble up will not actually rebuild it.

Christ at the Rubble

Nehemiah is not the last man to weep over Jerusalem. Five centuries after the walls were rebuilt, a man stood on the Mount of Olives and wept over the same city. It was the Jerusalem of the second temple, with walls in better shape than Nehemiah's ever were, and the city that Jesus wept over was not broken in any obvious way. The temple was operational. The sacrifices were running. The streets were full. By every visible measure, this was Jerusalem at its most prosperous since the days of Solomon. And yet Jesus wept, and what he wept about was a rubble the city could not see.

Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes (Luke 19:42). He was weeping about a ruin nobody in the city would have recognized as a ruin. The people were walking around on what they thought were intact walls, and he could see that the walls were broken in a way no Babylonian army would ever have to touch. Forty years later, in the year seventy of the Christian era, the Roman armies would surround the city, break down every stone the second temple sat on, and fulfill what Jesus had wept over. The physical rubble came later. The spiritual rubble had been there all along.

Every believer who has ever entered the Sheep Gate has done so because Jesus wept over his particular Jerusalem before he ever entered it. The ruin of a soul is not usually visible to the soul. The first work of the Spirit is to show us the ruin we have

been living in, and to give us eyes to see it as Jesus already sees it. Nehemiah weeping over broken walls in Susa is an image of the Lord weeping over broken souls in every generation. The gospel is what happens when the weeping turns into rebuilding. And the rebuilding begins at the Sheep Gate, which is the next page of this book, and the first station of the journey.

Let us go there.

Part One

Reception

Gates One through Three

The first three gates are the gates of entrance. They describe what happens when a soul is brought from exile back into the city of God. The Sheep Gate is the gate of salvation, the Fish Gate is the gate of witness, and the Old Gate is the gate of doctrine. Taken together they establish the foundation of the Christian life, the three movements without which no subsequent station can be walked. A soul saved, a soul sent, and a soul anchored. Everything that follows in this volume and in the three volumes beyond it is built on these three.

STATION ONE

The Sheep Gate

Salvation Through the Lamb

“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.” — John 10:9

The First Gate

Every account of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem begins in the same place. It begins at the Sheep Gate. Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel (Nehemiah 3:1). Every detail of that single verse has been carefully placed, and the reader who walks past it quickly will miss the theology that the rest of Nehemiah 3 assumes.

The first detail is the builder. The Sheep Gate was raised by the high priest and his fellow priests. This is the only gate in the entire chapter built exclusively by priests. The Fish Gate will be built by lay families. The Old Gate will be built by a priest and a man from Gibeon working together. The Valley Gate will be built by Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah. The Dung Gate will be built by Malchijah, a district official. The Fountain Gate will be built by Shallum the son of Colhozeh, an administrator. The Water Gate will be built by the Nethinim, the temple servants. The Horse Gate will be built by the priests who lived nearby. The East Gate will be built by

Shemaiah the keeper of the east gate. The Muster Gate will be built by Malchijah the son of the goldsmith. Every other gate is built by a mixed crew of priests and laypeople, or by laypeople alone, or by officials, or by craftsmen. Only the Sheep Gate is built by the priesthood by itself. The high priest is present. His brothers are present. No layman lays a stone.

This is not a matter of scheduling. It is a matter of theology. Salvation is not the work of a mixed crew. It is the work of the high priest alone. The Christian faith has been clear on this point from its earliest centuries, and the reason it has been clear is that Scripture is unambiguous about it. Salvation is not cooperation between God and man, with God contributing most of the work and the sinner contributing the rest. Salvation is the work of God alone, applied to those who believe. The sinner brings his need. The high priest brings the remedy. If the priests are at work on a gate that the laity cannot help build, it is because there is a door in this life that human effort cannot construct, and the one who tries to construct it has already misunderstood the nature of the problem.

The second detail is the consecration. The phrase they consecrated it appears twice in the single verse. The Hebrew verb is *qadash*, which means to set apart, to make holy, to consecrate.

qadash (קִדַּשׁ) is used throughout the Pentateuch for the dedication of the tabernacle and its furniture, for the setting apart of priests, for the sanctification of what belongs to God. It is used here, of a gate, twice in one sentence. Nothing else in the wall receives this treatment.

The repetition is the point. The narrator could have said they consecrated it once, and the fact would have been clear. He says it twice because the gate that leads to salvation is not a common gate. A gate that laymen build is useful. A gate that priests build and consecrate twice is holy. The first gate in the wall around the city of God has been set apart from the others because the transaction that happens at this gate is unlike any other transaction in a human life. A soul is passing from death to life. A rebel is being reconciled. An exile is coming home. The traffic at this gate is traffic no lesser gate was ever built to carry.

The third detail is the location. The Sheep Gate stands on the north wall of Jerusalem, adjacent to the temple, between the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower of Hananel. It is the gate nearest the sanctuary, because the sheep that passed through it were passing toward the altar. The text of Nehemiah cannot be understood without understanding where this gate stood and what passed through it. The Sheep Gate was the gate of the sacrifice. Every lamb offered in the temple came through this gate first. The gate was stained with blood because the altar was stained with blood, and the altar was stained with blood because the sin of the people had to be covered, and covering required blood to be shed. When the priests rebuilt the Sheep Gate with the consecration repeated twice, they were rebuilding the place where the sacrifice entered the city. They knew what was going to pass through it. Every other gate could afford a more modest dedication. This one could not.

The Lambs That Walked This Road

For a thousand years before the Sheep Gate ever stood in Nehemiah's wall, lambs had been walking toward Jerusalem. Shepherds from the villages south of the city, from Bethlehem and Tekoa and the fields around them, would drive their flocks up the hills toward the temple. The sheep for the daily sacrifice. The sheep for the sabbath offerings. The sheep for Passover, when the roads would be black with them, tens of thousands of lambs moving toward the one altar where every one of them would be slaughtered. The Sheep Gate was their entrance. It opened onto the Bethesda pool where the priests inspected them for blemishes, and it stood a short walk from the altar where the fire never went out and the blood never stopped flowing.

If you had stood at the Sheep Gate on any ordinary morning in the last five centuries before the birth of Christ, you would have heard the lambs. You would have smelled the blood. You would have seen the priests coming and going, their garments stained from the day's offerings. And if you had asked why, the answer would have reached back through the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures to a night in Egypt when a lamb had been slaughtered at each doorpost and the angel of death had passed over the houses where the blood had been applied. The lamb had always been the answer to the question the sinner could not answer for himself. The blood had always been the only thing that covered. The gate was simply the place where the answer entered the city.

And then one morning in the first century of the Christian era, a man stood on the banks of the Jordan river and saw a rabbi from Galilee walking toward him, and he said, Behold, the

Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). John the Baptist knew what he was saying. He knew the Sheep Gate. He had probably walked through it himself on his way to the temple as a priest's son. He had watched lambs move through that gate all his life. And when he saw Jesus walking toward the Jordan, he saw the answer to every lamb that had ever been led to slaughter. The thousand years of sacrifice had not been a waste. They had been a rehearsal. The real Lamb had finally arrived.

Every one of those earlier lambs had been a picture, and pictures are not what they depict. A picture of bread does not feed you. A picture of water does not quench thirst. A picture of the Lamb does not save. That is the lesson of the whole sacrificial system, and it is the lesson the book of Hebrews drives home at length. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Hebrews 10:4). Every lamb that passed through the Sheep Gate in the centuries before Christ was passing through as a shadow, and a shadow covers nothing. But when the reality arrived, he went through the same gate. Jesus entered Jerusalem on the road from Bethany, through a gate near the Sheep Gate, on the week that Passover was about to begin. He entered as the lamb enters, and he walked toward the altar as the lambs had walked toward it for a thousand years. The difference was that this time the Lamb would take the sin away.

The Door and What It Required

Jesus used the language of the Sheep Gate in John 10. Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen

to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture (John 10:7–9). Every phrase in that paragraph assumes the architecture of the Sheep Gate. The sheep are his people. The door is himself. Entrance through the door is salvation. The false shepherds who try to lead sheep by any other route are thieves, because the only legitimate way into the pasture runs through the door, and the only legitimate door is the one who is standing in front of his disciples saying it.

A door is a narrow thing. That is its nature. A door is not a field. A door is not a wide open country where anyone may enter from any direction. A door is a single passage, and everyone who enters must pass through it. Christian people have sometimes winced at this, because the exclusivity of the door sounds narrow in an age that prefers the wideness of the field. But the image Jesus chose was the image the Sheep Gate had been teaching for a thousand years. A gate is narrow because a gate is a gate. What is offered through it is not narrow at all. What is offered through the Sheep Gate is pasture, the green fields of the twenty-third psalm, the life of the soul under the shepherd's care. The narrowness of the door is the width of the pasture beyond it.

But the door cost something to stand where it stands. The Sheep Gate in Nehemiah 3 was rebuilt out of stone. The door in John 10 was rebuilt out of blood. Jesus did not say I am the door and leave the statement hanging in the air. He said, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11). The door of the sheep is the shepherd of the sheep, and the shepherd who opens the door is the one who dies to make it passable. The Sheep Gate of Nehemiah

was stained with the blood of ten thousand lambs. The door of Jesus was stained with blood too, but it was his own. Every other lamb had been a substitute pointing forward. He was the substitute the others had pointed to.

This is why the Sheep Gate stood nearest the temple and why the priests had to build it and why it had to be consecrated twice. The transaction that happens at this gate is the transaction that happens at the cross. It is the one place in the whole of human history where the sin of humanity meets the mercy of God and is dealt with, not covered temporarily by the blood of an animal, but cleansed forever by the blood of the Son. Every other gate on the wall serves its purpose. Only this one opens onto eternity.

What Entering Looks Like

The Sheep Gate is the first gate, and everyone who has become a Christian has passed through it. But what that passage actually looks like is worth saying carefully, because Christian teaching has sometimes reduced it to a formula and Christian experience has sometimes fallen short of the reduction. So a word about what it means to enter through the gate, and what it does not mean.

It does not mean saying a particular prayer. Many believers have found the language of the sinner's prayer helpful, and many have marked the date of that prayer for the rest of their lives. Others have come to Christ in quieter ways, over weeks or months, with no single moment they can point to on a calendar. Both are genuine. What the gate requires is not a formula but a reception. A sinner receives a Savior. A sheep receives a shepherd. A wanderer receives a home. The words

used to mark the reception are less important than the reception itself, and Scripture does not prescribe a formula because a formula is not what saves. The blood of the Lamb saves. The words are how we call on him. But the words are not the salvation.

It does not mean joining a church. Joining a church is the next step, not the first step, and the churches that matter are the churches that know the difference. A person may have been baptized as an infant and confirmed as a teenager and walked the aisle as an adult and still have never entered the Sheep Gate. A person may have never been inside a church at all and may be entering right now, on this page, in a way that will be confirmed by everything that follows. The gate is not the building. The gate is the Lamb.

It does not mean becoming a better person. The gate does not open to the improved. It opens to the ruined. The improved do not need it. They do not know they are sheep that have gone astray, and they do not believe they require a shepherd. The gate opens to the ones who know they are lost. That is why Jesus said, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners (Mark 2:17). The gate is not for the moral. It is for the rescued. Anyone who thinks he has entered because he was already respectable has not yet entered. Anyone who has entered knows that respectability had nothing to do with it.

What it does mean is simpler than any of the things it does not mean. Entering the Sheep Gate means trusting the Lamb. It means acknowledging that you are a sinner who cannot rescue himself. It means believing that Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is the one who rescues. And it means handing yourself

over to him, not just for forgiveness, which is the part the sinner wants first, but for lordship, which is the part the sinner resists most. The Lamb is also the Lord. You cannot have him as Savior without having him as King. The door opens to a pasture, but the pasture belongs to the shepherd, and the shepherd decides where the sheep graze.

The posture of entrance has four movements that Scripture names in various places, and they are worth naming here, even though the order in which any given soul experiences them varies. There is knowledge, which is knowing who Jesus is and what he has done. There is assent, which is agreeing that what Scripture says about him is true. There is trust, which is personally relying on him rather than on anything else. And there is surrender, which is laying down the self-rule that every human heart wants to keep. A soul that has knowledge without assent has not entered. A soul that has assent without trust has not entered. A soul that has trust without surrender has misunderstood what trust is. All four are present in every genuine passage through this gate, though they arrive in different orders and are recognized at different speeds by different people.

The Promises Beyond the Gate

What lies beyond the Sheep Gate is not a reward earned but a gift given, and the gift has dimensions that the new believer will spend the rest of his life discovering. The reason the new believer does not grasp all of it at once is not that God is withholding. It is that the gift is larger than any single day's capacity to receive. A whole life is needed to unwrap what one moment of faith hands to the soul. But some of what is given

is worth naming at the threshold, so that the believer who has just entered has some sense of what he has been given.

He has been given life, and not a diminished life but eternal life, which means life of the age to come, life that is not subject to the death that was the wages of his sin. Whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). The life is not a future acquisition that arrives only at death. It is a present possession. He who believes has eternal life, present tense, right now (John 6:47). The gate does not open to a promise of future life. It opens to a life that has already begun and will not end.

He has been given forgiveness, full and irreversible, not because his sins have been minimized or excused but because they have been paid for. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace (Ephesians 1:7). Past sins, present sins, sins he has not yet committed but will, all are covered by the blood of the Lamb. The debt is not reduced. It is paid. The judge who handed down the sentence is the same judge who absorbed the penalty, and no one is going to reopen the case.

He has been given peace with God, which is not merely a cessation of hostilities but a restored relationship. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). Peace in the biblical sense is not the absence of trouble. It is the presence of right relation. The one who enters the gate has been reconciled to the one against whom he had offended, and there is nothing between them any longer. He may still struggle with sin. He may still fear God in the reverent sense this volume has already commended. But he will not be in the

condition he was in when he was east of Eden, estranged, under wrath. The estrangement is over.

He has been given adoption. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared (1 John 3:2). Not servants. Not tolerated guests. Children. With all the rights of children, all the inheritance of children, all the access of children. The Father whom he had offended is now his Father. The house he had been locked out of is now his home. And the Spirit by whom he can call this God Father is now resident in him, confirming by witness to his own spirit that he is indeed a child of God (Romans 8:15–16).

He has been given indwelling. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16). This is the most astonishing gift of the first gate, and it is the one for which the second volume of this series will be required. The Holy Spirit has taken up residence. The believer has become a temple. The God who was once distant, protected from the worshiper by thick veils and repeated sacrifices, has moved in. The veil has been torn. The distance has been closed. And the whole life that follows is lived under the active presence of God inside the believer, a presence that convicts and comforts and empowers and sanctifies across every one of the gates that remain.

And he has been given security, which is not the same as casualness. Christian teachers have argued for centuries about the conditions and the nature of the believer's final perseverance, and this volume is not where those arguments will be settled. What can be said without controversy is what Jesus himself said. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never

perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand (John 10:27–28). The sheep who has entered through the door is kept by the shepherd. The keeping is not the sheep's achievement. It is the shepherd's care. The warnings that Scripture gives to those who are tempted to fall away are real warnings, and this volume will take them seriously when the later gates bring them into view. But the security offered at the Sheep Gate is not a conditional security subject to the sheep's strength. It is the security of being held by hands that will not let go.

Assurance for the Anxious

A word for the reader who has entered the gate but is not sure she has. This is more common than new believers realize, and it troubles consciences that did not need to be troubled. The question, Am I really saved? has haunted honest believers in every century, and the honest believer is usually the one who asks it. The careless never do. So the asking is often evidence of what the asker fears she lacks.

John wrote his first epistle for exactly this reason. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13). The verb is know, not hope, not guess, not try to feel. God wants his people to have certainty, and he has given them his Word so that they can. The tests of assurance that John lays out across his letter are not tests of performance. They are signs of life. Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ? Do you love the brothers? Do you find that sin grieves you when it used to delight you? Do you obey his commandments in a general direction, not perfectly but truly? If these things are present,

even in seed form, the life is there. The gate has been passed. The assurance is warranted.

Assurance is not the same as feeling. Feelings come and go. Assurance rests on fact. The fact is what Christ has done, and what Christ has done does not rise and fall with the believer's mood. On the days when the soul feels dry and the prayers feel wooden and the sin feels strong, the assurance is still true. The gate has not closed behind you and locked you out because your emotions dipped. The shepherd who died for you did not die conditionally. He died for you, and the cross cannot be uncrossed. If you are trusting him, you are in the flock. If you are trusting him, you will be kept.

The antidote to weak assurance is not stronger feelings. It is stronger fixing of the eyes on the one who is the door. Look at him, not at yourself. Look at what he has done, not at what you have failed to do. Look at his wounds, which are the proof of his love. The more you look at the door, the surer you will be that you are inside the house.

Christ at the Gate

Christ at the Gate: The Sheep Gate is the first gate because the Lamb is the first answer. Every gate that follows depends on this one, because every subsequent station in the Christian life depends on the soul having first passed from death to life. The Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8) stood waiting at this gate through the long centuries when the pattern was only a shadow, and when he finally came, he

came in person to be what the thousand years of lambs had been pointing to. He did not merely open the gate for others. He became the gate. He did not merely offer the sacrifice. He was the sacrifice. He did not merely point the way to the Father. He himself is the way, and the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through him (John 14:6). A reader who has entered at this gate has entered in the only way the gate opens. A reader who has not yet entered is being welcomed now. The door is open. The shepherd is calling. The blood has been shed. The way is prepared.

This is the first station. The one who has stood at the rubble has now stood at the gate, and the gate has opened, and he is inside the city. What remains is the journey across the other gates, and the first of those follows immediately. Every sheep who has been brought in is eventually sent back out. Not back to exile, but into the city streets, and beyond the gates on errands the shepherd assigns. The next gate teaches what the sent sheep goes out to do. It is called the Fish Gate, and it is about catching. Not being caught. Catching. Every Christian who has been caught by the gospel is eventually sent to catch others with it. The Fish Gate is where that begins.

STATION TWO

The Fish Gate

Called to Witness

“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” – Matthew 4:19

The Second Gate

The sons of Hassenaaah built the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars (Nehemiah 3:3). The construction crew has changed. At the Sheep Gate the high priest and his brothers worked alone. At the Fish Gate a family of laymen takes the lead. The symbolism could not be clearer. Salvation is the priest’s work. Witness is the layperson’s. The sons of Hassenaaah are not named anywhere else in Scripture. They are a family of common people who set their hands to the second gate because God had ordained that the message of what had happened at the first gate would be carried by ordinary believers, not by specialists.

The Fish Gate stood on the north wall of Jerusalem, west of the Sheep Gate. It was the gate through which the fish trade entered the city. Tyre was on the coast, two days’ journey away, and the men of Tyre brought fish into Jerusalem through this gate and sold them in the markets on the sabbath as well as every other day, which was one of the scandals Nehemiah had to address later in the book (Nehemiah 13:16). The name of the gate was literal. Fish came through it. The smell of the sea hung at this gate in a way it did not hang at the others. And the location of the gate on the wall, looking

out toward the trade routes rather than in toward the temple, was itself a theological statement. The Sheep Gate faced the altar. The Fish Gate faced the nations.

Every community of believers learns the same lesson the sons of Hassenaaah learned. The soul that has entered through the Sheep Gate is now turned outward. The blood that has been applied is now a message that must be carried. The one who has been saved is the one who announces that salvation is possible. The Sheep Gate made him a sheep. The Fish Gate sends him out as a fisher of other sheep still wandering in the waters outside the city. The gates are not disconnected. The Fish Gate makes no sense to a soul who has not passed the Sheep Gate. But a soul that has passed the Sheep Gate and refuses to approach the Fish Gate has not yet understood why he was saved.

The Galilean Fishermen

The language of fishing for men was not an abstract metaphor when Jesus used it. It was a working-class phrase used on a particular beach in a particular year. Four fishermen heard it. They were brothers, two pairs, and they were pulling at the same set of nets they had pulled at every morning of their adult lives. Peter and Andrew. James and John. The sons of Jonah and the sons of Zebedee. The Sea of Galilee behind them. The hills of Capernaum in front of them. Jesus walked along the shore one morning, saw them at their work, and said seven words that lifted them out of that work forever. Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men (Matthew 4:19).

They knew what he meant. A fisherman catches what is moving and does not yet know it has been caught until the net

closes around it. A fisherman works in the element that is foreign to him, the sea, which is not his habitat but the fish's. A fisherman goes out at hours that are not convenient, at night when the fish are feeding, at dawn when the water is still. A fisherman mends his nets when the work is done, because the nets will wear out and the fish will not wait. And a fisherman knows that the fish do not come to the shore of their own accord. The fish are caught by going to the water and letting down the net. They came because the fisherman went.

Jesus took those four men and made them the first crew of a boat that has been fishing ever since. They did not immediately understand how the fishing would happen. For three years he trained them by example, going himself to the ones no one else was going to, to the tax collectors and the prostitutes and the lepers and the demon-oppressed, and calling them home by the simple authority of being who he was. And then on a mountain in Galilee after the resurrection, he turned the apostolic crew into the whole church, and gave them a commission that has never been withdrawn. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). All nations. Not some. Not the ones who look like you. Not the ones who are already half-persuaded. All. The Fish Gate has always opened toward all.

Every Believer a Fisherman

This is the point at which many believers hesitate, and it is worth lingering over. Very few Christians feel equipped to fish for men. The professional sense of the word evangelist has been used so long that ordinary believers sometimes assume fishing is a specialty belonging to someone else. Pastors fish.

Missionaries fish. The gifted speakers at the front of the room fish. The rest of the congregation listens to sermons about fishing and feels vaguely guilty that they are not better at it themselves.

But the Fish Gate was not built by priests. It was built by the sons of Hassenaah. And the fishermen who were first called were not theologians. They were men with callused hands and unfinished educations who smelled faintly of fish no matter how many times they washed their hands. The point of Jesus choosing them was precisely the point that every subsequent Christian missed at some time or other. Fishing for men is the work of ordinary believers, and it is done with the tools ordinary believers have. A life lived openly under the lordship of Christ. A conversation honestly engaged with a neighbor who is asking real questions. A willingness to name what the Lord has done in one's own life when the opportunity comes. Most fishing for men happens over coffee, not behind pulpits.

Peter, who was one of the original four, eventually wrote a letter to other Christians who were not apostles and were not evangelists and were simply trying to live faithfully in hard places. He told them what to do when they were questioned about their faith. Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). The word translated defense is the Greek word that gives us the English word apology, in its older sense of a reasoned explanation. Peter is not telling ordinary Christians to be apologists in the professional sense. He is telling them to be ready. Ready for the conversation. Ready to say why they believe what they

believe. Ready with gentleness, which is not timidity, and respect, which is not compromise.

This is the shape of the Fish Gate in ordinary life. Not the organized crusade, which has its place. Not the formal apologetic, which has its place. The ordinary conversation in which an ordinary Christian answers an ordinary question with the ordinary truth. The sons of Hassenaaah, building their gate by themselves, raising the beams, setting the bolts, hanging the doors, while the priests worked next door on their gate. There is no hierarchy of gates. The Fish Gate is as important as the Sheep Gate. One saves. The other announces. Neither is more holy than the other. Neither is optional.

The Methods and the Motives

A word is worth saying about how the fishing is done, because the manner of fishing has always been at least as important as the fact of it. It is possible to fish for men in ways that catch no one and damage the one doing the fishing. It is possible to fish in ways that win an argument and lose a soul. It is possible to fish in ways that force a conversion and produce a convert who will not last a year. The early church watched all three happen and warned against all three, and the warnings are still worth hearing.

Paul described his own method in a passage that has shaped Christian witness ever since. For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law, though not being myself under the law, that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law,

though not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some (1 Corinthians 9:19–22).

The whole paragraph circles around a single word. Win. Five times in five sentences. The word is almost commercial. Paul is not trying to prove himself right. He is trying to gain souls. The difference between those two goals shapes everything else, because a Christian who is trying to prove himself right will argue with unbelievers in a way that gratifies his own sense of being correct and leaves the unbeliever colder than he was before. A Christian who is trying to win souls will meet the unbeliever where the unbeliever actually stands, will speak the language the unbeliever actually speaks, and will carry the argument at the pace the unbeliever can actually bear. Paul's flexibility was not a compromise of the gospel. It was a discipline in the service of the gospel. The gospel did not bend. The messenger did.

The motive has to be love, because nothing else will sustain the effort. A Christian who fishes for men out of guilt will exhaust himself and give up. A Christian who fishes for men out of duty will become mechanical and unfruitful. A Christian who fishes for men to prove a point will become insufferable. Only a Christian who genuinely loves the souls he is trying to reach can sustain the work over decades, and can bear the rejections that will come, and can rejoice honestly when one of them is caught. Paul said of his own kinsmen after the flesh, I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have

great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers (Romans 9:1–3). That is the motive. That is the heart that fishes. Anything less will not cast the net at all, or will cast it without catching anything.

The Fear That Silences

Most believers who have not fished know why they have not fished. They are afraid. They are afraid of sounding foolish. They are afraid of damaging a friendship. They are afraid of being asked a question they cannot answer. They are afraid of being thought a fanatic. The fear is not irrational. All of those outcomes are possible. Witnessing for Christ is not a safe activity. It has never been. The apostles were killed for it. The early Christians were thrown to beasts for it. The Reformers were burned for it. The missionaries were speared for it. And in our own time, in countries where the gospel is still contested, believers are still losing jobs and families and sometimes lives for speaking the name of Jesus.

But the fear of men is not a Christian virtue. The fear of the Lord is a Christian virtue. Proverbs 29:25 names the difference directly. The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe. The fear of man silences the witness. The fear of the Lord loosens the tongue. And Christians who have spent much time in the presence of the Lord find, over time, that the fear of the Lord grows and the fear of men shrinks. This is not because believers become bolder in themselves. It is because the weight of God's reality grows heavier in the soul than the weight of other people's opinions,

and a soul calibrated by God's reality eventually finds that other people's opinions cannot compete.

The antidote to the fear of men is not trying harder to be brave. It is spending more time with the Lord until bravery becomes almost accidental. The disciples in the book of Acts were timid men who had denied their Lord in a courtyard weeks before. After Pentecost they stood in front of the same Sanhedrin that had condemned Christ and preached him openly, and the council marveled, and perceived that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). That is the source of witness. Having been with him. The disciples were not braver. They had been with Jesus, and it showed.

When the Net Is Empty

A word also has to be said about unfruitful seasons, because every honest fisherman has them. Luke 5 tells the story of a night the apostolic fishermen spent on the sea of Galilee and caught nothing. Master, we toiled all night and took nothing (Luke 5:5). The nets were empty. The morning was beginning. The fishermen were tired. And Jesus told them to let the nets down one more time, and the catch was so large the nets began to break, and Peter fell at his knees and said, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord (Luke 5:8).

Every Christian witness has toiled all night and taken nothing at some stretch of the road. The conversations do not go anywhere. The family member who was so close years ago seems further now than ever. The co-worker changes the subject. The friend you have been praying for for a decade does not come. The natural conclusion is that one has failed as a fisherman. The biblical conclusion is that the Lord has his

own timing, and the command of the gospel is to let down the net when he says to let it down, and the result is his business, not the fisherman's.

Paul said it in a more agricultural metaphor. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6–7). A Christian who has faithfully witnessed to someone who has not yet believed has not failed. A Christian who has never faithfully witnessed to anyone at all has missed one of the purposes of the gate. The difference between planting that has not yet grown and no planting at all is enormous. God gives the growth. He cannot give the growth to a seed that was never planted.

Christ at the Gate

Christ at the Gate: The Fish Gate opened onto the nations because the gospel was always going to be for the nations, and the Lord who called fishermen by the Sea of Galilee had already determined that the message of the Sheep Gate would travel to every place where fish were caught and every market where they were sold. He is himself the first fisher of men. He caught Peter in a boat and Matthew at a tax table and the Samaritan woman at a well and Zacchaeus in a tree and the thief on a cross and Paul on the road to Damascus, and he has been catching men ever since. Every Christian who has been caught was caught by him, and every fisherman the church has ever produced is fishing with his net,

in his water, at his command, for his harvest. The Fish Gate is not the gate of our impressiveness. It is the gate of his patience with the world, mediated through ordinary Christians who have themselves been caught and who now cast the net he placed in their hands.

The reader who has entered the Sheep Gate is now being sent out through the Fish Gate. Not as an expert. Not as an orator. As an ordinary believer who knows the Lord and is willing to speak his name. The nets you have been given are the nets he used. The water you are fishing in is the same sea he walked on. And the catch, when it comes, will be his.

But fishing cannot be done from ignorance. A fisherman who does not know what he is fishing for will not fish well, and a Christian who does not know what he believes will not witness well. The gate that follows the Fish Gate addresses this problem directly. It is called the Old Gate, and it is the gate of doctrine. The witness who has been sent must now be anchored in the truth he has been sent to proclaim.

STATION THREE

The Old Gate

Anchored in the Ancient Paths

“Thus says the Lord: Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.” — Jeremiah 6:16

The Third Gate

Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars (Nehemiah 3:6). Two men again, not a family this time, working together. One with a Hebrew name that means Yahweh knows. The other with a name that means Yahweh’s counsel. Between them they rebuilt the gate that the text calls old. Not damaged, not weak, not obsolete. Old, in the sense of ancient, of having been there from the beginning, of belonging to the foundation rather than the renovation. Every translation renders it differently. Some read it as the gate of the old city, suggesting it gave access to an older district. Others read it as the gate called Old, understanding the name to mean the gate that had always been there. Either way, it is the gate of what came before. The gate of antiquity. The gate of what the city began as.

A new believer who has been saved at the Sheep Gate and has begun to witness at the Fish Gate is now led to a gate that anchors everything. The Christian life is not a novelty. It is the latest chapter of a story that reaches back two thousand years

before Christ and two thousand years after, and the new believer who does not know what he has inherited will be vulnerable to anyone who tells him the story began yesterday. The Old Gate teaches the convert the old things. The creeds the church has confessed for centuries. The doctrines the Spirit has preserved across fires and famines and heresies and schisms. The ancient paths that Jeremiah commended to a generation that was losing its way.

The Ancient Paths

Jeremiah's verse in the sixth chapter of his book is the theological center of this station. He was preaching in Jerusalem in the decades before the Babylonian exile. The people were wandering. The worship was confused. New cults had crept in, old idolatries had been revived, prophets who prophesied lies were popular, and faithful prophets were not. Into that confusion Jeremiah spoke a sentence that has been quoted in every generation of the church since. Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.

Four imperatives in one verse. Stand. Look. Ask. Walk. The first is a deliberate pause. Do not rush past the crossroads. Stop at the place where the paths meet. The second is an act of discernment. Examine the paths. Compare what is before you with what is behind you. The third is an inquiry made of those who have walked the roads before. Ask. Which path is the old one. Which path is the one where the saints of earlier generations walked. The fourth is the commitment. Walk in it. Do not linger at the crossroads forever, but once you have found the ancient path, take it. And the promise that follows

the four imperatives is a promise the soul will recognize as true when it hears it. You will find rest for your souls.

Rest for the soul is not found on the new paths. It is found on the ancient ones. This is true experientially, and the reader who has spent any time in Christian culture has probably already noticed it. The new movements, the innovative theologies, the latest redefinitions of what the gospel must mean in order to be relevant to the current moment, these do not produce rest. They produce agitation. They produce exhaustion. They produce the restless hunger for the next new thing, because the newness is always about to be superseded. The ancient path is different. A Christian who stands on the doctrine the church has held for twenty centuries is standing on ground that does not move, and standing on ground that does not move is what a soul needs.

The Foundation That Does Not Shift

Jesus ended the Sermon on the Mount with the same image Jeremiah used. The man who built his house on rock. The storm came, the winds blew, the rain beat against the house, and the house stood. The man who built on sand had a house that fell, and great was its fall. And the difference between the two men was not their intelligence or their skill. It was the ground they built on. Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock (Matthew 7:24).

Jesus's own words are the rock. Scripture generally is the rock. The truths Scripture has taught consistently, from Genesis to Revelation, are the rock. And the Old Gate is the gate through which the believer passes to discover, sometimes for the first

time, the stability of what he has been given. The gospel did not begin with him. The gospel does not depend on him for its authentication. The gospel was taught by the apostles and preserved by the martyrs and defined by the councils and carried by the missionaries and preached by the Reformers and sung by the hymn-writers and handed down through centuries of faithful believers into the hands of the new convert who now has to decide whether he is going to stand on it or try to improve on it.

Improving on it is the universal temptation of the educated Christian. The one who has read widely, the one who has encountered cultures other than his own, the one who has been exposed to the objections of the unbelieving world, the one who has felt the force of the modern academy, is tempted to think he has seen something earlier believers missed. He is the first generation that really understands, in the way the moderns understand, that this or that doctrine cannot be held in quite the way the church has always held it. He will therefore adjust. He will soften. He will re-express. He will preserve the spirit of the old doctrine while setting aside the letter of it. And five years later, or ten, or twenty, he will discover that what he preserved was not the spirit but an echo of the spirit, and the doctrine he thought he had improved has drifted so far from what the church meant by it that it is a different doctrine entirely.

The Old Gate is the antidote to this temptation. It does not forbid serious thinking. It does not demand that the believer refuse to engage the questions of his own time. It simply insists that the starting point for all serious thinking is the doctrine the church has held, and that any improvement

which requires the abandonment of that doctrine is not an improvement but an exile. The path is old for a reason. Generations of believers walked it and found it reliable. The new believer who is just discovering it does not need to reinvent it. He needs to walk it.

What the Ancient Path Contains

A word is worth saying about what the old doctrines actually are, because the phrase sometimes invites the suspicion that the writer has in mind a particular denomination's distinctives. He does not. The doctrines the church has held across the centuries are the doctrines summarized in the earliest creeds, the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, which predate the denominations by more than a thousand years and which every orthodox Christian tradition across the world still confesses.

The creeds name God the Father, maker of heaven and earth. They confess Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, descended to the dead, rose again on the third day, ascended to the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead. They confess the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life. They confess the catholic church, which is to say the universal church, the communion of saints. They confess the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. These are the old paths. The church has held them without significant variation for seventeen centuries. The new believer who stands on them stands with Augustine and Chrysostom and Luther and Calvin and Wesley and Edwards

and Spurgeon and Lewis and Lloyd-Jones and every saint he can name and every saint he cannot name.

The ancient paths also include truths not in the creeds but settled in Scripture by the careful reading of the whole church across time. That Scripture is the Word of God, inspired, authoritative, sufficient. That salvation is by grace through faith, not by works. That Jesus is fully God and fully man. That the atonement is substitutionary, that Christ bore the penalty of sin for those who believe. That the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force but a person of the Trinity. That the church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. That baptism and the Lord's Supper are instituted by Christ for his people. That sin is real, that hell is real, that heaven is real, that Christ will return. These are the doctrines on which the Christian life depends, and they are the doctrines at which the new believer, walking through the Old Gate, is asked to pause and receive.

Avoiding the Novel

Paul warned Timothy about a particular kind of drift that every pastor and every congregation has had to watch for in every century since. The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths (2 Timothy 4:3-4). The language is careful. The problem is not that people have stopped listening. They listen more than ever. The problem is what they listen to. They accumulate teachers. They multiply them. They search for the ones who scratch where they itch. And the consequence is not unbelief in the bald sense. It is myth. They wander off into

stories that are not quite Christianity, told with Christian vocabulary, adjusted to the preferences of the audience.

The Christian living in the current century will recognize the pattern immediately. The spiritual marketplace is enormous. The teachers are innumerable. The platforms from which they broadcast are unprecedented. A new believer can, within an afternoon, receive instruction from dozens of teachers representing dozens of incompatible theologies, every one of them confident, every one of them articulate, every one of them persuasive if listened to in isolation. And the discernment required to navigate that marketplace has to come from somewhere. It cannot come from the marketplace itself, because the marketplace cannot adjudicate its own disputes. It has to come from the Old Gate. From the doctrines the church has held. From the creeds that were written before any of the current teachers were born and will still be held after every one of them is forgotten.

This is why the new believer must pass through the Old Gate before he spends much time in the marketplace of teachers. The believer who has been shaped by the ancient paths has internal equipment for detecting departures from them. The believer who has never been shaped by the ancient paths has no such equipment, and will be blown around by every wind of doctrine that blows. Paul warned about this in Ephesians. So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes (Ephesians 4:14). Children are tossed. The mature are not. And the way the mature became mature was by being grounded in what is old.

The Local Church as the Place of the Gate

There is a practical implication that should not be passed over quickly. The Old Gate cannot be entered alone. A solitary Christian reading his Bible in isolation, without the company of a local church, without the discipline of a confession of faith that he has received from others, without the accountability of elders who can correct him when he drifts, is in the worst possible position to be anchored in the ancient paths. He will become his own theologian. He will make up a Christianity that is actually a reflection of his own preferences. And five years later he will be on a novel path, wondering why he feels so alone.

The church has never believed that the individual Christian, unassisted, can find the ancient paths by himself. The doctrines that make up the ancient paths were defined in community, preserved in community, transmitted in community, and can only be received in community. A local church is not an optional addition to the Christian life. It is the place where the Christian life is lived. The new believer who has been baptized and has joined a faithful congregation has walked through the Old Gate without necessarily realizing it, because the local church that teaches the ancient creeds and preaches the ancient truths is doing what the Old Gate exists to do. The new believer who refuses local church membership, or attends only irregularly, or hops from congregation to congregation without ever being shaped by any of them, has not yet walked through this gate.

This is a particularly pressing word in an age when the structures of local church have been weakened by every conceivable pressure. Online sermons make it possible to

receive teaching without receiving community. Busy schedules make it possible to reduce Sunday attendance to an occasional courtesy. Cultural mobility makes it possible to remain uncommitted to any one congregation for years at a time. All of these pressures work against the Old Gate, because all of them isolate the believer from the community in which the ancient paths are preserved. The new believer who will be anchored is the new believer who has committed to a faithful local church, who attends regularly, who submits to its teaching, who sits under its discipline, and who serves alongside its members. There is no other way to walk this gate.

When the Ancient Path Has Been Neglected

Many believers come to the Old Gate later than they should have. They were converted some time ago, perhaps in a youth group or at a camp or in a moment of crisis, and they have lived as Christians for some years, but they were never given the old things. They know that they believe in Jesus. They could not give a coherent account of the Trinity. They trust that their sins are forgiven. They could not explain how. They expect to go to heaven. They would struggle to articulate what heaven actually is, or why it matters that the body rises, or how the justification they vaguely remember hearing about is related to the sanctification they vaguely feel they should be pursuing.

If you are reading this and you recognize yourself in that description, do not be discouraged. The Old Gate does not have a statute of limitations. You can stand by the roads now, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, and walk in them. The doctrines you were never taught are still there to be received.

The creeds you never memorized can still be memorized. The catechism your church may or may not use can still be worked through, as a private discipline if the pastor cannot lead you through it. Many believers have the experience of suddenly discovering, in their thirties or forties or sixties, that the Christianity they thought they had known is far deeper than they realized, because the old doctrines they had walked past for decades turn out to be the ones that would have answered every question they have been asking.

The ancient paths do not belong to a particular life stage. They belong to the whole Christian life. And the new believer and the old believer who has somehow missed them stand at the same gate. Both are welcomed through. Neither is too late.

Christ at the Gate

Christ at the Gate: The Old Gate is finally about the one who is himself the Ancient of Days. Jesus said, Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am (John 8:58). The doctrine the church has held across the centuries is not primarily a body of propositions. It is a witness to a person. The person is Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). When the new believer stands at the Old Gate and receives the old doctrines, he is not receiving a system. He is receiving a fuller picture of the one who saved him at the Sheep Gate. Every doctrine in the creeds is a doctrine about him. Every truth in the ancient paths is a truth that tells the believer more about who the Lord is. The Old Gate is the

gate through which the shepherd becomes known in his fullness. He is God and man. He is Savior and Lord. He is eternal Son and incarnate Word. He is priest and sacrifice. He is the one who was, who is, and who is to come. To walk through the Old Gate is to learn who you have been trusting. It is to fall in love with him more deeply because you know him more truly.

And so the first three gates close. Saved at the Sheep Gate. Sent at the Fish Gate. Anchored at the Old Gate. The foundation has been laid. The Christian has been received, commissioned, and grounded. Nothing in the Christian life can be built without these three, and many Christian lives have collapsed because one of them was skipped. But the three are only the beginning. The road turns now, and the gates that follow are not the gates of reception but the gates of refinement. The soul that has been saved and sent and grounded must now be humbled and cleansed. That work begins at the next gate, which is the Valley Gate, where pride is brought low and the believer is taught what it means to walk in a valley rather than on a mountaintop.

Part Two

Refinement

Gates Four and Five

The first three gates welcomed the believer into the city. The next two will take him down into the valleys the city overlooks. The Valley Gate is the gate of humiliation, the place where self-sufficiency is broken. The Dung Gate is the gate of cleansing, the place where sin is removed. These are not gates the believer walks through quickly and leaves behind. These are gates he will pass through repeatedly across his whole life, because the pride that requires humbling and the sin that requires cleansing are not exhausted in a single season. Welcome to the gates of refinement. They are harder than the first three. They are also the gates that make every subsequent station possible.

STATION FOUR

The Valley Gate

Humbled and Broken

*“He must increase, but I must decrease.” —
John 3:30*

The Fourth Gate

The Valley Gate was repaired by Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah. They rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars, and a thousand cubits of the wall, as far as the Dung Gate (Nehemiah 3:13). Four details demand attention before the theology can be read. This is the longest single repair in Nehemiah 3. A thousand cubits is roughly fifteen hundred feet, nearly a quarter of a mile. No other section of the wall required this much work. This is the gate that demanded the most, and the men who were assigned to it were not a famous family or a priestly clan. They were Hanun, whose name in Hebrew means gracious, and the residents of a village called Zanoah, twelve miles from Jerusalem, who had traveled to the city to take on the job no one else had the manpower for. The Valley Gate needed a whole village to rebuild it, because a valley gate is the hardest to build well.

The location is the second detail. The Valley Gate stood on the southwest side of Jerusalem, at the lowest elevation in the city. It looked out over the Valley of Hinnom, which ran along the south and west of the city and dropped away sharply into the ravine beyond. A gate at the low point of a city is the most vulnerable gate on the wall. Enemies who attack from above

have the advantage, and the defenders at the base have to look upward at their attackers. Every ancient city that had a valley gate regarded it as the gate that required the most reinforcement, the thickest bolts, the heaviest bars. Nehemiah's text does not say why the Valley Gate was so badly damaged. It says only that it was, and that the damage stretched for a thousand cubits. The valley side of the city was where the breaches ran widest.

The third detail is the work itself. The verse lists the components. Doors, bolts, bars, and a thousand cubits of wall. The Valley Gate is the only gate for which the wall connecting it to the next gate is specifically mentioned. The Dung Gate stood just below it, and Nehemiah names the connecting stretch because the two gates had to be held together. The humiliation of the Valley Gate and the cleansing of the Dung Gate are connected by a long wall that cannot be breached. In the life of the believer these two gates are inseparable. One breaks the pride. The other washes the sin that the broken pride now sees. Without the wall between them, the work is incomplete.

And the fourth detail is the symbolism of the valley itself. The Valley of Hinnom, looking out from the Valley Gate, was not an ordinary valley. It was the most haunted piece of ground in the land of Israel, and every believer in Jerusalem knew what it was.

The Valley of Hinnom

The Hebrew name is Ge Hinnom, the Valley of Hinnom, from which the Greek transliteration Gehenna derives.

Ge Hinnom is rendered in most English translations as hell, because the New Testament uses Gehenna as the standard word for the place of final judgment. Jesus used the word more than anyone else in the Bible. When he described hell, he described this valley.

The valley had a history that made it the natural image for divine judgment. In the centuries before the exile, under the wicked kings Ahaz and Manasseh, the Israelites had fallen into an apostasy so extreme that they had built high places in this valley and burned their children alive as offerings to the Canaanite god Molech. Jeremiah recorded the horror. They have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire (Jeremiah 7:31). The children were placed on the heated arms of the brass idol while the priests of Molech beat drums to drown out their screams. The ground of that valley had been soaked with the blood of sacrificed children, and there was no worse sin in the national memory.

Jeremiah prophesied that the valley would become a place of judgment. Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when it will no more be called Topheth, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter (Jeremiah 7:32). By the time of Jesus, the Valley of Hinnom had become exactly what the prophet said it would become. It was the city dump of Jerusalem. Garbage was thrown there. Dead animals were thrown there. Executed criminals whose bodies no one claimed were thrown there. Human refuse was thrown there. Fires burned continually to consume what was thrown in, and the fires never went out. The worms that fed on the refuse never stopped breeding. The smoke that rose from the valley

was visible from the city walls at all hours. It was the single most degraded piece of ground in the country.

This is what the Valley Gate looked out on. When the men of Jerusalem opened this gate and walked out, they walked toward a valley of perpetual burning, of rotting refuse, of remembered child sacrifice, of death in its most dishonored forms. Jesus drew on this imagery when he used the word Gehenna for the place of final judgment. His listeners did not need the metaphor explained. They had seen the valley. They had smelled it. They had grown up being warned not to go near it. And when Jesus said, Fear him who, after the body has been killed, has authority to cast into Gehenna. Yes, I tell you, fear him (Luke 12:5), they understood precisely what he was saying. Gehenna was not a poetic exaggeration. It was a real place, and the reality it stood for was worse than the valley by an order of magnitude that no imagination could measure.

Why the Gate Faces This

The theological significance of the Valley Gate is now visible. The gate through which the believer passes to be humbled is the gate that looks out at hell. It is the gate that keeps the believer honest about what he has been saved from. It is the gate that prevents the Christian life from becoming pleasant and self-congratulatory by forcing the believer to remember, at regular intervals, what would have been his destiny without the Lamb.

The human heart does not remain humble on its own. A new believer who passed through the Sheep Gate in tears, overwhelmed by what had been done for him, often discovers that ten years later he is no longer in tears. The familiar

becomes routine. Grace that was once astonishing becomes ordinary. The salvation that once seemed miraculous now seems almost expected, almost earned. And without a gate that looks out at Gehenna, the believer slowly drifts into a Christianity that has lost its weight, a Christianity of good manners and moral improvement, a Christianity that has forgotten what it was saved from.

The Valley Gate is the antidote. It faces the believer outward, toward the valley, and forces him to see what he deserves. Not to produce despair, which is never the Lord's goal, but to restore proportion. The believer who has looked into the valley and remembered that he was not carried there because of the Lamb is a believer whose gratitude is renewed and whose pride is melted. He cannot boast. He has just looked at what he escaped. Any claim to righteousness of his own collapses in front of the Valley of Hinnom. Only the blood of Christ stood between him and that valley, and the blood of Christ was not his contribution. It was the Lamb's.

The Valley of Humiliation

The Valley Gate has a second meaning as well, and the two meanings run together in the Christian life like two streams in one riverbed. The gate faces outward at Gehenna, but it also teaches the believer to walk downward, into the valleys of his own experience. Not hell. The ordinary valleys of life in a fallen world. The disappointments. The failures. The seasons when God seems silent. The losses that do not resolve. The prayers that are not answered. The suffering that serves no visible purpose and ends no sooner for all the prayer poured into it.

John Bunyan's allegory named this the Valley of Humiliation, and Christian the pilgrim descended into it not long after he had received the armor of God. In the valley he met Apollyon and fought him hand to hand, and nearly died, and emerged scarred but alive. The valley was not optional. Every pilgrim was required to pass through it. And Bunyan understood what the biblical writers understood, that the valley is the school of humility, and that no saint in any age has been made without its curriculum.

The psalms describe the experience. Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! O Lord, hear my voice (Psalm 130:1). Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? (Psalm 42:5). My soul refuses to be comforted (Psalm 77:2). The psalmists were not faithless. They were honest. They described what it felt like to walk through the valley, and they did not pretend it was a pleasant stroll. The valley is hard. It is supposed to be hard. A soul that has not been broken has not been prepared for what comes after the valley, and the God who brings his children through the valley is not sparing them but perfecting them.

Paul's description of his own thorn in the flesh is the classic New Testament account of the valley. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:8–9). Paul prayed for deliverance. The deliverance did not come. What came instead was the word that grace is sufficient and that power is made perfect precisely in the weakness the sufferer wishes would be removed. The thorn remained. Paul did not graduate

out of the valley. He learned to live in it, and the learning was the sanctification the thorn was sent to produce.

What the Valley Does

The Valley Gate accomplishes several things in the believer that no other gate accomplishes, and a word is worth saying about each of them.

It breaks self-sufficiency. The believer who has not walked in a valley still half-believes that he is managing his Christian life by his own competence. He prays, but he is not sure the prayers are reaching anyone who would not have acted without them. He obeys, but he is still scoring himself on his obedience. He serves, but he has not yet discovered how quickly his strength gives out when the serving gets hard. The valley reveals what the level ground concealed. In the valley, his competence fails. His strength runs out. His prayers feel unheard. And he discovers, not in theory but in experience, that he cannot carry his own life. Only someone outside himself can carry it. The valley is where the believer stops trying to be his own shepherd and lets the Lord be the shepherd he claims to be.

It exposes pride. The human heart is almost infinitely capable of self-regard, and the Christian heart is not exempt. A believer can serve the Lord for years and still harbor attitudes of self-congratulation that no one has ever named. The valley exposes them. When the believer is brought low, the things he has been quietly admiring himself for collapse, and he sees for the first time how much of his spiritual life was built on self-approval rather than on the approval of God. It is not a pleasant discovery. It is a necessary one. A Christian who has

not seen his own pride will not be able to repent of it. The valley is where the seeing happens.

It teaches compassion. A believer who has not suffered is of limited use in a world full of suffering. His words to the grieving feel hollow even when his intentions are kind. His advice to the anxious sounds theoretical. His counsel to the tempted is thin. But a believer who has walked the valley has a different register. He can sit with the grieving without needing to fix them. He can listen to the anxious without rushing to reassure. He can encourage the tempted from a place of having been tempted himself and lived to tell about it. The compassion of the valley-walker is different in kind from the goodwill of the comfortable. Paul said, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Corinthians 1:3–4). The valley is where the comfort is given. The valley is where it becomes transferable.

It deepens intimacy with God. This is the paradox of the valley that the believer discovers only after he is partway through it. The God who seemed distant on the mountaintop turns out to be nearer in the valley than he ever was before. Fear no evil, for you are with me (Psalm 23:4). The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit (Psalm 34:18). When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you (Isaiah 43:2). The promise is not that the waters will part. The promise is that he will be with you in the waters. And the believer who has experienced the presence of the Lord in the

valley discovers that he would not trade what he found there for any amount of easier terrain. The valley gave him something no mountaintop could give.

The Descent of Christ

No believer ever descends into a valley that Christ has not descended into first and deeper. The Valley Gate is about the humiliation of the soul, but every humiliation the soul experiences is a faint echo of the humiliation the Son experienced in coming down from heaven to be born in a stable and live among the poor and be misunderstood by his family and rejected by his nation and abandoned by his disciples and crucified by his creation.

Paul wrote what may be the densest paragraph in the New Testament about the descent. Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:6–8). Seven movements of descent in two sentences. From the form of God, downward. To not grasping equality. To emptying. To taking the form of a servant. To being born in the likeness of men. To being found in human form. To humbling himself. To obedience unto death. To death on a cross.

The one who walked through the Valley Gate most completely is the one who opened the gate in the first place. The Son of God descended lower than any saint will ever be asked to descend, and in his descent he sanctified the valley forever. Every Christian who has passed through a dark stretch of

ground has walked where his Lord walked before him. He has not been abandoned in the valley. He has been accompanied by the one who knows the valley floor because he walked it himself. And he will eventually emerge, as his Lord emerged, on the other side, in the light of resurrection morning.

Christ at the Gate

Christ at the Gate: The Valley Gate is the gate of the humbled Christ. The one who looked out from the top of the wall at the Valley of Hinnom is the same one who, in the fullness of time, went outside the city entirely and was crucified on a hill that was itself a small valley, a place of refuse outside the camp where criminals were executed and bodies were disposed of. He descended into the valley not as a visitor but as the one who would take the valley's meaning into himself. The shame of Gehenna was borne by him. The judgment that should have fallen on sinners fell on him. The humiliation that the believer walks through at this gate is not the humiliation he deserved. It is the humiliation the Lord accepted so that the believer would not have to face it alone. When a Christian walks through the Valley Gate and feels himself being brought low, he is being conformed to the shape of the one who was brought lower still. Whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Matthew 23:12). The exaltation is the promise. The valley is the path.

The believer who has walked through the Valley Gate is now a different believer than the one who entered it. The pride has been shaken. The self-sufficiency has been challenged. The compassion has been planted. The intimacy with God has begun to deepen. But the valley has also exposed sin, and the sin exposed must be dealt with. The gate that follows the Valley Gate addresses precisely that. It is the Dung Gate, the gate of cleansing, the gate of sanctification in its hardest and most practical form. The humbled believer is now taken to the place where the refuse is removed.

STATION FIVE

The Dung Gate

Cleansed and Sanctified

“So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.” —

Hebrews 13:12–13

The Fifth Gate

Malchijah the son of Rechab, ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate. He rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars (Nehemiah 3:14). One man this time. An administrator, the governor of a neighboring district, the kind of man who would ordinarily have delegated the unpleasant work to someone else. But the Dung Gate was his assignment, and he took it himself. The narrator gives no indication that he complained. He simply rebuilt the gate through which the refuse of the city passed, and he did it by himself. His name in Hebrew means my king is Yahweh, which is the correct attitude for a man assigned to clean out the city's waste.

The Dung Gate stood just below the Valley Gate, at the southern end of Jerusalem. A thousand cubits of wall connected the two, as the text has already noted. Through the Dung Gate the refuse of the city passed, carried out on wagons or on the backs of servants, to be dumped in the Valley of Hinnom below. The city was walled. It had to clean itself.

There was no other way. Waste accumulates in any inhabited space, and a city without a dung gate is a city that eventually chokes on its own filth. Jerusalem had a gate dedicated to the exit of the unclean, and the name the city gave it was honest. The Dung Gate. No euphemism. Refuse goes here.

The Hebrew word used for the name of the gate is shaphot, which is strong and blunt. It names what the gate carries.

shaphot has been softened in some English translations to Refuse Gate, which is accurate but genteel. The Hebrew is the uglier word, and the ugliness is the theological point. A gate through which filth leaves a city should not be named politely. The believer at this station is asked to look at his own filth with the same honesty. A soul that insists on calling its sins mistakes or weaknesses or personal challenges has not yet arrived at this gate. A soul that can name its sins with the plain word for what they are has.

The location and the name together make the theological meaning inescapable. This is the gate of sanctification in its practical form. What is unclean is carried out. What is polluted is removed. What offends the God who dwells in the city is taken beyond the walls and dumped in the valley that already represents judgment. Sanctification is not primarily about becoming more spiritual in some airy sense. It is about taking out the trash. It is about naming the specific sins that have accumulated in the believer's life and carrying them out through the gate the Lord has provided for the purpose. The Valley Gate broke the pride. The Dung Gate now removes what the broken pride has exposed.

Outside the Camp

The pattern of Scripture on this point is consistent, and it runs from the earliest chapters of the Pentateuch to the Passion of Christ. Sin is carried outside. Uncleaness does not stay in the city. The leper in Leviticus was required to live outside the camp until his skin was clean. The carcass of the bull offered for the sin of the priest was carried outside the camp and burned. The scapegoat on the Day of Atonement, bearing the sins of the nation confessed over its head, was led outside the camp and released into the wilderness. The refuse of the sacrifices was carried outside the camp. The execution ground was outside the camp. Everything unclean was located outside. The holy was inside. The defiling was out. And the gate through which the defiling was carried was the Dung Gate, or the gate that functioned as the Dung Gate in every iteration of the pattern.

The New Testament picks up this pattern and drives it toward its astonishing conclusion. The writer of Hebrews, in the thirteenth chapter, makes the connection that the whole sacrificial system had been preparing for. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood (Hebrews 13:11–12).

Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem. Not inside. Outside. On the hill called Golgotha, outside the city walls, near the route that led to the Dung Gate. He suffered where the refuse was dumped. He was treated as what the pattern had always treated as unclean. He bore the sin of his people and he was

carried, in his own body, to the place where sin had always been carried, and he was there destroyed in the fire of divine judgment while the sin of the world was consumed with him. The writer of Hebrews puts the implication directly in the next verse. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured (Hebrews 13:13). The place of the Lamb was outside. The believer follows him there.

The Practical Work of Cleansing

Sanctification is not mysterious, though it is demanding. The process is named repeatedly in Scripture and it follows a pattern the believer can recognize. Conviction comes first. The Spirit, who has been given to the believer at the Sheep Gate and is resident in him from that day onward, begins to press on some specific sin. Not on sin in general. On that sin. The Spirit is precise. He does not work by blanket accusations. He works by pointed ones. A particular habit, a particular attitude, a particular pattern of speech, a particular resentment, a particular lust, a particular idol. The believer becomes aware, often unwillingly, that this is the thing the Lord is going to deal with next.

Confession comes second. The believer names the sin in the words the Spirit is pressing on him. He does not hide it under euphemisms. He does not excuse it by explaining the circumstances that made it understandable. He names it. He agrees with God about what it is. First John tells the believer what follows. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). The verb is present tense in the Greek. He keeps

on forgiving. The cleansing is ongoing. The believer brings the sin, the Lord forgives the sin, and the relationship is restored. Repentance comes third. Confession is naming. Repentance is turning. The Greek word for repentance is *metanoia*, which means a change of mind that issues in a change of direction.

metanoia is sometimes reduced in popular teaching to feeling sorry. The Scripture's use of the word is sturdier than that. A believer who confesses a sin without turning from it has not repented. He has only acknowledged. A believer who turns from a sin without confessing it has not repented either. He has only reformed. Repentance is confession and turning held together. The sin is named, and the direction is changed, and the two movements are one motion.

Replacement comes fourth, and this is the step believers most often miss. Ephesians 4 is the paradigm text. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need (Ephesians 4:28). The pattern is not stop stealing. The pattern is stop stealing and start working. The sin is put off and a righteous alternative is put on. A believer who merely stops doing a sin without replacing it with the corresponding obedience has created a vacuum that the sin will return to fill. The whole letter of Ephesians works by this put-off-put-on pattern, and every chapter of it applies the pattern to a different sphere of life. The Dung Gate carries the refuse out. The garden within must be planted with something new, or the weeds will be back.

And finally, persistence. Sanctification is not a one-time operation. The Dung Gate is not a gate the believer passes through once and leaves behind. The believer will be back at this gate many times, with different refuse, at different seasons, in different areas of the heart that the Spirit is addressing next. This is normal. This is the pattern. The Christian life is not a process of becoming sinless. It is a process of becoming increasingly sensitive to sin and increasingly quick to carry it out through the gate. The mature believer is not the one who no longer sins. The mature believer is the one who no longer lingers with his sin, who names it quickly, confesses it quickly, repents quickly, and replaces it quickly, so that the gate is always functioning and the city is always being cleaned.

What the Spirit Does Not Remove

A word is necessary about what sanctification does not promise, because Christian teaching in various eras has promised what Scripture does not promise, and the disappointment of the believer who was led to expect too much has driven some believers out of the gate altogether.

Sanctification does not promise the eradication of sin in this life. The believer who expected, after his conversion, that he would no longer struggle with sin has been misled. Scripture is clear that the struggle continues. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8). Paul in Romans 7 describes his own ongoing struggle in terms no honest believer finds unfamiliar. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate (Romans 7:15). The mature apostle has not

graduated out of the war with his own flesh. He is still in it. The war will not end until the body is glorified and the flesh is left behind.

Sanctification does not promise the absence of temptation. Temptation comes to every believer regardless of spiritual maturity, and the mature believer is often tempted at the points where he has grown strongest, because the enemy targets the strong places as well as the weak. Jesus himself was tempted in the wilderness, and the temptations came in the first few weeks after his baptism, not in some adolescent weakness years before his ministry began. Temptation is not a sign of spiritual failure. Temptation is the ordinary climate of life in a fallen world, and the believer learns to recognize it, resist it, and keep walking.

Sanctification does not promise a feeling of constant victory. The feelings of the Christian life vary. There are seasons when the believer feels close to God, when prayer comes easily and Scripture opens up and the battle against sin feels winnable. There are other seasons when the believer feels nothing, when prayers feel wooden and Scripture feels flat and sin feels strong. Both kinds of seasons are ordinary. Neither kind is a final verdict on the believer's standing with God. The believer is kept by grace, not by feelings, and the absence of feelings is not the absence of grace.

The Discipline of Naming

Because sanctification requires the naming of specific sins, and because the human heart resists such naming with remarkable creativity, the believer is wise to develop the discipline early. The refuse in the heart does not carry itself

out through the Dung Gate. It has to be identified, loaded, and hauled. A believer who waits for the Spirit to do the whole operation without any participation on his part will wait a long time. The Spirit convicts. The believer carries.

Journaling the conviction, for believers who can write, is often helpful. Bringing the conviction to a trusted fellow believer in the local church, who can pray with the convicted believer and, when appropriate, hear the confession, is deeply helpful. The Roman practice of auricular confession to a priest was an overreach of a genuine biblical impulse. James did not require the sacramental structure that Rome eventually added, but he did require something. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed (James 5:16). Not to a professional class of confessors. To one another. Believers who confess specific sins to other believers, in the context of trust and prayer and accountability, find that the gate functions more efficiently than it does in solitude. The sin that is named aloud to another human being has been carried further through the gate than the sin that is only named silently in the believer's own heart.

This is, incidentally, part of what the local church is for. The Old Gate introduced the local church as the place where the ancient paths are taught. The Dung Gate confirms it. The local church is also the place where the mutual confession James requires can actually happen. A believer who has no relationships of that kind of trust is missing something Scripture considers essential, and the absence will show up in his sanctification. The Dung Gate was built by one man by himself in Nehemiah 3, but that is the exception to the pattern of the chapter. The rest of the wall was built in teams, and the

rest of the Christian life is walked in teams. Isolation makes sanctification hard.

The Ongoing Nature of the Gate

One last observation before the close of the station, and then before the close of the volume. The Dung Gate is the gate the believer returns to most frequently of any gate. The Sheep Gate is passed once, in the sense that conversion happens once. The Fish Gate and the Old Gate are passed and then revisited as the Christian life continues, but not necessarily daily. The Valley Gate is passed in seasons. The Dung Gate is passed continually. Every day the believer has refuse to carry out. Every day the Spirit has something to press on. Every day the believer has the opportunity to confess, repent, replace, and continue. This is what the Christian life is made of. Not dramatic conversion experiences. Not heroic acts of faith. The daily, repeated, unglamorous work of letting the Spirit take out the trash.

Paul named this rhythm in the seventh verse of the second chapter of Colossians. As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving (Colossians 2:6–7). As you received him, walk in him. The gate of reception continues as the gate of walking. The conversion continues as the sanctification. And the Dung Gate is the gate at which the walking is done.

Christ at the Gate

Christ at the Gate: The Dung Gate is the gate at which the believer discovers, more clearly than at any previous station, how far the Lord was willing to go for him. He went outside the camp. He became, in the words of Paul, sin for us, who knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). He was treated as the refuse of the world so that the believer would not have to be. The man who bore the unbearable became unbearable on the cross so that the sinner could be brought inside the walls and live. And the believer who walks through the Dung Gate, carrying out the refuse of his own heart, is not walking alone. He is walking in the company of the one who carried out the refuse of every heart that has ever believed. Every sin the believer names and confesses and repents of has already been borne. The gate is open because he opened it. The refuse can be carried out because he carried it out first. The cleansing is real because his blood cleansed it. The Dung Gate, ugly as its name is, is finally a gate of grace, and the one who made it a gate of grace is the one who went to the cross to become the offering it was always waiting for.

Conclusion

The Road That Leads to the Fountain

Five gates have been walked.

The believer who began this volume at the rubble of Jerusalem has passed through the Sheep Gate, where the Lamb opened the door of salvation. He has passed through the Fish Gate, where he was commissioned to witness to what he had received. He has passed through the Old Gate, where he was anchored in the doctrine the church has held across the centuries. He has passed through the Valley Gate, where his pride was humbled and his self-sufficiency was broken. And he has passed through the Dung Gate, where the Spirit began the ongoing work of cleansing him from sins he had not previously named. Saved, sent, anchored, humbled, cleansed. These are the gates of the first volume. These are the five stations of the beginning of Christian life.

But the work of the first five gates is not complete without the sixth. The believer who has been saved and sent and anchored and humbled and cleansed is now standing at the gate that Volume Two begins with. It is called the Fountain Gate, and what happens there determines whether the Christian life that has begun at these five gates will become the Christian life the Lord intended it to become. Because the cleansing of the Dung Gate creates a vessel that needs to be filled, and the one who fills is the Holy Spirit, and the gate at which he fills is the Fountain Gate.

This is the theological structure that cannot be emphasized too strongly. The sequence is not arbitrary. The Lord does not

fill vessels that have not been cleansed. He does not pour his Spirit into a heart that is still refusing to name its sin. The Fountain Gate comes after the Dung Gate, and the order is the order of experience. A believer who wants to be filled without being cleansed is asking for what Scripture does not offer. A believer who submits to the cleansing is preparing himself for the filling that follows.

This is also why Volume Two is a volume rather than a chapter. What happens at the Fountain Gate is large enough that it requires sustained attention over many sessions. The practical questions about the Holy Spirit, the theological questions about how divine power and human effort work together, the contested questions about spiritual gifts, the mature questions about what it means to walk in the Spirit day by day, cannot be treated in passing. They are the subject of the second volume.

But the second volume cannot begin until the first has ended. And the first ends here. A believer standing at the end of this volume is standing between the Dung Gate and the Fountain Gate, in the wall that connects them. He has been cleansed. He is ready for what comes next. The gate ahead is open. The Spirit is waiting.

Walk on.

The walls of Jerusalem are not finished. Five gates of the ten are behind you. Five gates of the ten are ahead. The road between the gates is longer than you know and shorter than it feels. The one who has been walking with you across these five will not abandon you at the sixth. He is,

in fact, the gate you are about to enter. His name is the Spirit of Christ, the Comforter, the Helper, the one the Father sent in the Son's name. He has been in you since the Sheep Gate. At the Fountain Gate he begins the work you could not begin by yourself. Until then, rest. You have walked far. The next volume waits.

Primary Scripture References

Introduction: Nehemiah 1:1–4 (Nehemiah’s grief over the walls); Nehemiah 1:5–11 (the prayer of confession and remembrance); Nehemiah 3:1–32 (the rebuilding of the gates in sequence); Nehemiah 6:15–16 (the fifty-two days); Nehemiah 8:1–8 (Ezra reading the Law at the Water Gate); Isaiah 26:1 (the city with walls called Salvation); Isaiah 60:18 (walls of Salvation, gates of Praise); John 10:9 (I am the door); Matthew 5:4 (Blessed are those who mourn).

Prologue: Nehemiah 1:3 (trouble, shame, broken wall, burned gates); Nehemiah 1:4 (Nehemiah weeping and fasting); Nehemiah 1:5–7 (confession including himself); Nehemiah 1:8–9 (the promise of gathering); Luke 19:41–42 (Jesus weeping over Jerusalem); Matthew 5:4 (mourning and comfort).

Station One — The Sheep Gate: Nehemiah 3:1 (built and consecrated by priests alone); John 1:29 (Behold, the Lamb of God); John 10:7–11 (I am the door; the good shepherd lays down his life); John 14:6 (I am the way); Hebrews 10:4 (the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins); Revelation 13:8 (the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world); Romans 5:1 (peace with God through justification); Ephesians 1:7 (redemption through his blood); John 3:16 (eternal life); John 6:47 (he who believes has eternal life, present tense); 1 John 3:2 (we are God’s children now); Romans 8:15–16 (the Spirit confirms adoption); 1 Corinthians 3:16 (you are God’s temple); John 10:27–28 (my sheep will never perish); 1 John

5:13 (that you may know you have eternal life); Mark 2:17 (I came not to call the righteous but sinners).

Station Two — The Fish Gate: Nehemiah 3:3 (built by the sons of Hassenaah); Nehemiah 13:16 (Tyrian fish merchants at the gate); Matthew 4:19 (I will make you fishers of men); Matthew 28:19–20 (the Great Commission); 1 Peter 3:15 (always be prepared to give a defense); 1 Corinthians 9:19–22 (becoming all things to all people); Romans 9:1–3 (Paul's sorrow for his kinsmen); Proverbs 29:25 (fear of man versus trust in the Lord); Acts 4:13 (the council perceived they had been with Jesus); Luke 5:1–11 (the miraculous catch); 1 Corinthians 3:6–7 (I planted, Apollos watered, God gave the growth).

Station Three — The Old Gate: Nehemiah 3:6 (repaired by Joiada and Meshullam); Jeremiah 6:16 (stand, look, ask for the ancient paths); Matthew 7:24–27 (the wise man built on the rock); Hebrews 13:8 (Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever); John 8:58 (before Abraham was, I am); 2 Timothy 4:3–4 (itching ears and wandering into myths); Ephesians 4:14 (no longer children, tossed by every wind of doctrine); Jude 3 (contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints).

Station Four — The Valley Gate: Nehemiah 3:13 (repaired by Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah; a thousand cubits of wall); Jeremiah 7:31–32 (the Valley of Hinnom, Topheth, the Valley of Slaughter); Luke 12:5 (fear him who can cast into Gehenna); Psalm 130:1 (out of the depths I cry); Psalm 42:5 (why are you cast down, O my soul); Psalm 77:2 (my soul refuses to be comforted); 2 Corinthians 12:8–9 (Paul's thorn and sufficient grace); Psalm 23:4 (I will fear no evil, for you are with me); Psalm 34:18 (the Lord is near to the

brokenhearted); Isaiah 43:2 (when you pass through the waters); 2 Corinthians 1:3–4 (the comfort that becomes transferable); Philippians 2:6–8 (the descent of Christ); John 3:30 (he must increase, I must decrease); Matthew 23:12 (whoever humbles himself will be exalted).

Station Five — The Dung Gate: Nehemiah 3:14 (repaired by Malchijah the son of Rechab); Hebrews 13:11–13 (bodies burned outside the camp; Jesus suffered outside the gate); 1 John 1:8–9 (if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive); Ephesians 4:28 (let the thief no longer steal but labor); Romans 7:15 (I do not do what I want); James 5:16 (confess your sins to one another); Colossians 2:6–7 (as you received him, so walk in him); 2 Corinthians 5:21 (he was made sin for us who knew no sin); Matthew 27:33 (the place called Golgotha, outside the gate).

END OF VOLUME I

Volume II, The Power That Carries Us, awaits at the Fountain Gate.