

## Enter The Gates

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church  
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There are a few famous gates in history. One that comes to mind is the Ishtar Gate constructed by Nebuchadnezzar in 575 B.C. at the entrance to Babylon. Daniel and his friends, as well as many other Jews, were in Babylon at the time of its construction and no doubt would have walked through it numerous times. It was dedicated to the Babylonian goddess of reproduction, Ishtar (called Astarte, Asherah or Ashteroth in Hebrew and other ancient languages), a name that has come down to us today in our language as “Easter.” The gate is decorated by ceramic tiles which have retained their predominant bluish color for 25 centuries.



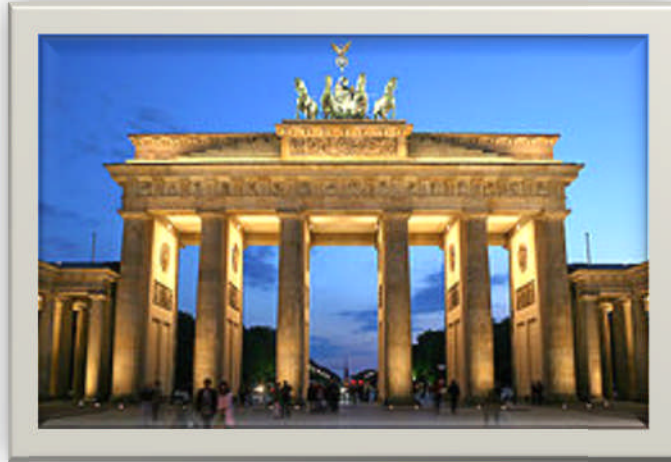
The Ishtar Gate was recovered and removed from ancient Babylon, transported and rebuilt in the Pergamon Museum of Berlin, Germany. It is 47 feet high by 100 feet wide. Actually, this is only the smaller “outer” gate that was reconstructed. The larger “inner” gate was considered too large to erect and lies in storage. For about a millennium, the Ishtar Gate enjoyed a place among the famous “Seven Wonders Of The World,” till in the sixth century A.D. when it was replaced on that list by the lighthouse in Alexandria, Egypt.

Another famous gate is the Brandenburg Gate which, by coincidence, also happens to be in Berlin, Germany. It was commissioned by King Frederick William II of Prussia as a sign of peace and built by Karl Gotthard Langhans from 1788 to 1791 and was restored from 2000 to 2002. Today it is considered one of Europe's most attractive landmarks.

It consists of twelve Doric columns, in sets of six pairs that form five passageways. These sets of columns are topped by an impressive structure on which rests the quadriga, a chariot drawn by four horses and driven by Victoria, the Roman goddess of victory. The gate's design is similar to the Propylaea, the gateway to the Acropolis in Athens, Greece.

When the Nazis gained power, they employed the Gate as a party symbol. After Germany's surrender in 1945 the governments of east and west Berlin restored it in a joint effort. People were allowed to freely walk through its passageway until August, 1961 when the Berlin Wall was constructed limiting access to and from East Berlin. On June 12, 1987, U.S. President Ronald Reagan spoke to the people of West Berlin at the Brandenburg Gate, appealing for the removal of the wall and the opening of the gate.

Addressing General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, Reagan said, "General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." When the 1989 Revolution occurred and the wall came down, the Brandenburg Gate was re-opened on December 22, 1989, and Helmut Kohl, the West German chancellor, walked through the Gate and was greeted by Hans Modrow, the East German prime minister.



These gates may have their glory, but they are not so beautiful and significant as the gates we'll study today. What do you think those gates are? Those are the gates to the city of God, the gates of pearl described by John in Revelation. "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. And her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city of pure gold, like transparent glass." Revelation 21:10-12, 21.

John, who saw the city "from a great and high mountain," seems to have had a similar experience to that of Moses, who, from the heights of Mt Nebo was given of view of the promised land. The Apostle John did his very best to describe what he saw in vision, but I'm sure that when we actually see the city and its gates, we will be overwhelmed at the beauty and magnificence.

The questions that come to us today are, what do the Scriptures tell us about the significance of the gates and how we may find entrance therein? Those are important questions. Although the devil does his best to distract us from life's real purpose, there will come a day when the question of how to gain access into that city will consume the minds of every living being.

All of this has come to be because of another gate that was closed. The sin of Adam and Eve brought about their expulsion from the Garden of Eden and

therefore God “placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.” Genesis 3:24. Angels at the gate of Eden because of sin; angels at the gates of the New Jerusalem after the restoration. How great is the kindness of our God to devise a plan to bring humanity back into favor with Him! Although it required the supreme sacrifice, the death of Jesus Christ, God’s plan envisions an eternal future of peace and happiness. This plan includes you!

Someday, by His grace, we’ll walk through the gates made of pearl into the city He’s prepared. Each gate, we’re told by John, is made of one large pearl. Why pearl? Why not cedar or gold or some other substance? Three related thoughts are brought to view by the gates being made of pearl. First and foremost, is that the pearl is used by Scripture to represent Christ. In one of the shortest of the parables, but one full of significance we read, “The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” Matthew 13:45, 46.

Jesus is the Pearl of great price. A relationship with Him is worth more than any other thing on this earth. “What will it profit a man if he should gain the whole world, but lose his own soul? And what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” When one discovers the riches of His grace and the value of the reward He has offered, nothing on this planet will compare. Moses lost sight of the glittering gold of Egypt when He met the Lord and had “recompense as to the reward.” With untold joy Philip, after he met Jesus, told his friend Nathaniel, “We have found Him, of whom the prophets wrote.” John 1:45. Have you “found Him”? Have you made this discovery? Do you know Jesus? Is He your Friend and Savior? Have you given your heart to Him? Is He the Pearl of great price to you? Have you told someone else about Him lately?

Every single saint who enters that city will walk through a gate made of pearl. There’s no other way in. What is the message in that architecture? It is that there is no other way into that kingdom but through Jesus. Every person who enters that city will know that it is not because he or she deserves citizenship there; it is not through their good works that they qualify for residency, but by the Gift of God’s dear Son Who gave Himself for us that anyone can enter.

“No one comes to the Father except through Me,” said Jesus. John 14:6. He is the Door of the sheepfold. It is only through His blood that entrance can be gained into that city. The enemy of souls would like to make it seem that there are other “ways,” but only of Jesus can it be said, He is “the way, the truth and the life.” One

time I asked someone whether they had a walk with the Lord, and they replied, "I'm on a spiritual path." The Bible says, "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." Proverbs 14:12. It may be that "all roads lead to Rome," but there is only one Way to eternal life, and that is through Jesus. Those pearly gates at the entrance to the eternal city will forever remind us of the central truth of the Christian faith, that it is only through the grace of Christ that we are made citizens of His kingdom.

Secondly, let us consider the way a pearl comes to be and see what can be learned. We generally associate pearls with oysters, but actually they can be produced by other mollusks as well. The key factor in this process is that a foreign object, perhaps a grain of sand or something else enters the host. A fragment, an irritant, something perhaps that is microscopically small that the oyster accidentally ingests becomes embedded and attached to the inside of its shell, and because of this the organism begins a protective, defensive process of setting down layer after layer of calcium carbonate in crystalline form called nacre. The material is deposited in concentric layers and has the same material (and color) of the shell of the mollusk. The oyster surrounds that "something," that foreign irritant, with countless layers of mother of pearl to produce a rare and precious jewel.

The creation of this "reaction to a foreign irritant" results in something that is beautiful and lustrous. Among the qualities of a pearl, luster is one of the most important. "Luster" is defined as "soft reflected light; sheen; brilliance or radiance of light; brightness; glory, radiance, distinction or splendor." The luster of a pearl depends upon the refraction and reflection of light from its translucent layers. The more layers of the iridescent nacre there are, the finer the luster.

The size of a pearl also bears directly on its value. The largest pearl ever found was discovered in 1934 off the island of Palawan, by a Muslim Filipino diver. The one who discovered it thought he saw the silhouette of deity in its shape, so it was called the Pearl of Allah. Its official name now is Pearl of Lao-tze. Two years after its discovery, in 1936 Wilbur Dowell Cobb was given the pearl by a chieftain of Palawan in recognition for saving the life of his son. In 1980, the heirs of Cobb's estate sold it to a jeweler in Beverly Hills, California for \$200,000. It is now estimated to be worth about \$40,000,000. It weighs in at 14 pounds! Can you imagine a pearl that size? What will it be like to see a pearl so large that it functions as the gate of the city?



In 1999 Osama bin Laden attempted to purchase the 14 pound pearl because he wanted to present it as a gift to Saddam Hussein “to unite the Arab cultures,” but the sale didn’t go through.

Here’s the point: a pearl is a lustrous jewel that is formed through the introduction of a foreign irritant. Can you see why this illustrates God’s love? Can you see the story of Jesus and the cross in this object lesson? Can you see why He is the Pearl of great price? Can you see why a pearl is a perfect and eloquent “gate” into His city?

Sin was the foreign element introduced into the universe by Lucifer. It was a mysterious, unexplainable, alien object that brought irritation and annoyance. God’s grace, given freely through Jesus, was His response to this irritant. Not that we would ever think that sin is in anyway a good thing, but the love of God has shown even more brightly through His response to evil. No pearl would ever be formed without the entrance of a foreign irritant. The cross and salvation would never have been known had not the unwanted vexation of sin been introduced. The luster of God’s amazing grace, deposited through the centuries layer by layer, has caused the light of His love to shine even more brilliantly, just as the formation of a pearl demonstrates.

That was the experience of our Lord on this earth as He suffered through trials and temptation. Battling against the irritants of wicked men led by Satan, resulted in His character of love shining forth more brilliantly than ever. He never lost control;

He never retaliated against His enemies. “Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him Who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected (not in a moral sense, but as a merciful Savior), He became the Author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.” Hebrews 5:7-9. By experiencing life as we know it, by walking the thorny path of trials, Jesus was “perfected” in His role of High Priest. God’s grace applied against the irritation sin resulted in the pearl of salvation.

The pearl represents Jesus; it also represents us, because this will also be our experience as we walk the same path as He did. God allows things to come into our life, not to discourage us, but that we might flee to Him and obtain grace for assistance. I’m sure that all of you have experienced your share of difficulties in life. We wonder, “Why do these things happen?” Trials are never welcome, except if we see that through these things His plan is being worked for our ultimate benefit. His grace is sufficient for us. He’s making us into a jewel. The pearl of a Christ-like character is being formed within the son or daughter of God. He is leading us in the pathway of Christian development.

The formation of a Christian character is the purpose of life. Everyone who walks through those gates of pearl will recognize and thank God for their experiences in life, by which He conformed us into the image of His Son Jesus. They will understand this truth, how the “pearl” was formed in their lives. They will see in the gates the “Pearl of great price” and recognize the goodness of God in the application of His grace in their lives to form righteous characters. They will know that God has been with them every step of the way, through the valley of the shadow of death as their faithful Companion, sharing their sorrows and trials.

Third, there is yet another lesson in the gates of pearl through which the saints enter the city. The pearl stands for Jesus; we’ve noted that already. One of the names of Jesus in Scripture is “the Truth,” for He said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the life.” John 14:6. The “pearl” represents Jesus, who is the Truth. You cannot say that Jesus and Truth are disconnected or divided. They are inseparable. It is what He is, an integral part of the divine character. In the same way that the Bible says, “God is love,” He is also Truth. The pearl represents His character of truth.

We’ve heard the phrase “pearls of wisdom.” When Jesus said, “Do not cast your pearls before swine,” He was pointing out the futility of presenting precious Bible

truth to those who have no more interest in spiritual matters than a brute beast. As much as I love my dogs, I could read the Bible to them 12 hours a day and I don't think they would understand very much. The valuable pearl represents God's precious truth and righteousness. The gates (of pearl) of that City aptly represent the God of truth and righteousness. The gates likewise represent the qualities of those who enter thereby. Here's something very important we need to see: The ones who enter are those who subscribe to God's principles of truth and righteousness, in contrast to Satan's way of deception and lawlessness.

Notice these Bible references. "Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, and I will praise the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD, through which the righteous shall enter." Psalm 118:19, 20. Through His prophet John the Revelator Jesus declared, "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city." Revelation 22:14. Notice how emphatically obedience to God's commandments is linked to entrance through those gates.

It's a fact that we can't purchase salvation by our good deeds, but in the parable the one who acquired the pearl of great price "sold all that he had and bought it." What does it mean when the Bible talks about "buying" salvation? It means that though we can't purchase our salvation with money or good deeds, to receive the gift of salvation we must give up our will to Jesus. We must be willing to die to self. We must be willing to carry His cross, deny ourselves and crucify the fleshly desires we were born with. We must love God more than anything or anyone else. We must "fight the good fight of faith." But once we have given our will to Him, He will elevate, purify and strengthen it to be used by us in walking His way. When we take "His yoke" it means that He's beside us in the yoke and we're walking together.

The prophet Isaiah declared, "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?" Isaiah 55:1, 2.

The truth is that while we can't earn our way to heaven, salvation does cost us something. It requires our surrender. It requires the giving of our will to Him, which will result in loving obedience to all His commands. "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." I John 2:3, 4.

Let no one think that he or she can continue in careless disobedience and the trampling of any of His commandments and expect to be admitted to the heavenly portals. The words of Jesus are clear and unmistakable. “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’” Matthew 7:21-23.

Here’s why this is so crucial. What was the original point of attack by Satan? It was rebellion against the throne and law of God. With that in mind, how could it possibly make sense that God would admit to His eternal kingdom anyone who knowingly and intentionally violates His law? That would perpetuate the anarchy initiated by the great rebel himself! No wonder the Bible states, “Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in.” Isaiah 26:2. Only those who, by God’s grace, have an experience in faith and obedience will be privileged to step through those gates and partake of the tree of life. It was disobedience that closed the door to Eden; it will be by the grace of Christ evidenced by the obedience of faith that the gates will be opened to Eden restored.

Why should we not be loyal to Christ? Why should we not be faithful and obedient subjects of His wonderful kingdom? Why should we not allow Him to transform us to be like Jesus in thought and deed? That beautiful Pearl is Jesus and His truth. That beautiful pearl can be your character and mine, transformed by His power into something beautiful.

In the war-torn atmosphere of 1917, the son of Charles Hutchinson Gabriel left for battle. Not knowing whether he would see his dad again, among his last words to his father were, “Dad, if I never see you again here, I’ll meet you where the gates never swing outward.” Those words burned an impression into the mind of Charles, and he was led to write a Christian hymn, the chorus of which is

“I’ll exchange my cross for a starry crown,  
Where the gates swing outward never;  
At His feet I’ll lay every burden down,  
And with Jesus reign forever.”

Pray that you and I may be accounted worthy to be among those admitted through the gates of pearl into the eternal city.

