Cities, Gates and Elders

Establishing a Strong Church in a Dying Culture

BY CHRISTOPHER MONAGHAN
To my beloved wife, Debbie, who is a God-given strength and joy. You have brought a flow of honey to my path, sweetening my life, (Ezekiel 3:3) brightening my eyes, (1 Samuel 14:27) and strengthening my hands in the wilderness (Ex.16:31).

Brian Pritchard, for his extensive work on this manuscript, correcting structure, content, and flow. Thanks for your continued encouragement throughout this project.

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### Abbreviations

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<td>ABRL</td>
<td>Anchor Bible Reference Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMP</td>
<td>Amplified Version</td>
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<td>EJ</td>
<td>Encyclopedia Judaica</td>
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<td>HAGL</td>
<td>Harper Analytical Greek Lexicon</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDB</td>
<td>Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible</td>
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<td>INT</td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
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<tr>
<td>LHEDOT</td>
<td>Langenscheidt’s Hebrew-English Dictionary of the Old Testament</td>
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<td>NAS</td>
<td>New American Standard</td>
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<td>NEDOT</td>
<td>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament Edited by Merrill F. Unger and William White</td>
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<td>NIDNTT</td>
<td>New International Commentary on the New Testament</td>
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<td>New International Version</td>
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<td>PBD</td>
<td>Peloubet’s Bible Dictionary</td>
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<td>RVS</td>
<td>Revised Standard Version</td>
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<td>SBD</td>
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<td>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</td>
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Cities, Gates and Elders
introduction

This book began to form in my mind back when I was attending Bible School in the mid 1990’s. I remember hearing a true story about a person who was part of a leadership team in a ministry. The team began to notice a certain sin occurring over and over in their congregation. After a time of prayer, it was revealed that one of their own team was active in this same sin and was releasing this evil over the rest of the congregation. It was as if this person was the gateway for this sin into the rest of the ministry. Once this person was removed from leadership, this sin pattern was broken over the entire congregation.

*Cities, Gates and Elders* is my journey into the past to understand the Bible through the eyes and ears of someone who lived in that time period. I wanted to understand what it meant when Jesus
said to Peter, “…on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18 KJV).

His disciples understood that ‘gates’ were the gateways in which the elders of the city would sit and judge. The decisions made at the gates had authoritative power over an area. Jesus was saying that the decisions made in hell, would not prevail against the church of Jesus Christ!

The Word of God is eternal, but it was written in a particular time and place. Not one jot or tittle of God's Word shall pass away, but most of the nations and cultures of which it speaks disappeared long ago. The vast distance between the modern and ancient worlds is like a veil that distorts our view. Inevitably, we attach modern meanings and cultural connotations to the words of the Bible. If our meanings and connotations are not aligned to their original text, misinterpretations will soon follow. I believe we must remove the veil over the terms cities, gates and elders, in order to reveal the meaning of these words as held by the original authors, and then relating their spiritual significance for us today.

The beginning point is cities, which have always been the seats of power and authority of provinces, regions, nations and empires. Their origin is found in the beginning chapters of Genesis, and their influence extends throughout scripture. Cities were surrounded by imposing walls—a formidable bulwark against adversaries. But in the eyes of God, each city had an even greater purpose—a redemptive gift that would be used to bring blessing to its inhabitants. God speaks to the cities, calling them to repent, to listen to His words, and to obey His voice. He calls them to unity, atonement, and strategic intercession in order to unlock the doors of heaven. Part One examines these topics in depth.
Part Two addresses Gates and presents their ancient meaning and importance to the writers of scripture. The city gates were more than an entrance; they were the center of city life. Biblical references to gates often denote the legal, religious, political, and economic foundation upon which the city was built. When God blesses Abraham, He says: “…Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.” (Genesis 22:17) Here possession means authority and judicial control over Abraham’s enemies. Thus, whoever possessed the gates, possessed the city. Theologians and Bible translators typically fail to account for or convey the true meaning and symbolism of the gates.

Finally, and most importantly, Part Three speaks of the role of elders as judges who sit at the gate and watch over those going in and out of the city. The elders were extremely influential figures because of the judicial power they wielded. Consequently, the position of elders in New Covenant scriptures is strongly influenced by this history.

As was true in Paul’s day, so it is true today that “…the wrath of God is being revealed against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth…” (Romans 1:18, italics mine). Satan’s plan has always been to keep the truth suppressed, because known truth will set a people free! Fresh revelation is required for the Church as she seeks to be a source of light, and a force for righteousness, in the midst of a lost and dying world.

May God richly bless your reading of Cities, Gates, and Elders.
chapter one

The Origin of Cities

Scripture is a continual stream of covenants made between God and man for the reason of fellowship. The Bible is a history of God reaching out His hand of fellowship to man. As you read the Bible, understand that doctrine and knowledge are *secondary issues*. The scriptures were written as a love letter to you and me, written from God’s heart to our hearts.

In the beginning, God's habitation for man was called Eden, which is derived from the word *adan*, meaning: to live full of; producing or characterized by sensual delights and pleasures.\(^1\) The Garden was designed for man to fellowship with God and to discover the depths of relationship with His Creator. It was not a place of trouble, toil, and despair, as the earth would later become, due to sin. The Garden was designed as the ideal place for divine fellowship. Man’s original job was to keep the

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\(^1\) *LHEDOT*, p.241
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Garden so that it might remain a continual meeting place for God and man.

Man was the reason for creation.\(^2\) He was not an afterthought once creation was finished! God did not suddenly realize that there was no one to take care of the garden and then decide to create a man! The garden was designed to enhance Adam’s relationship with God. That is why he was given the ability to rule and to overpower anything that might deter him from intimacy with God. Therefore it was essential that Adam was not to be passive in this role.

The covenant or blood agreement that Adam had with God was to guard and keep Eden. He was blessed and hence empowered to do the work, as long as he obeyed. Adam could eat from any tree of the garden “...except of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and of blessing and calamity.” (Gen. 2:17 AMP) His disobedience to this command would later break the covenant. The resulting curse of Adam failing to maintain covenant with God began as “...the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.” (Gen. 3:23)

The word for “man” in Hebrew is adam, and the word for “ground” in Hebrew is adamah.\(^3\) Adam came from the adamah—or dust, until the breath of God transformed him into a living being. (Gen. 2:7) But Adam, the man made from the ground, succumbed to the temptation—the fruit of the ground—as offered by the serpent. Instead of ruling the ground, making it

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\(^2\) Adam refers to generic man (or the personal name) as the image of God or the crown of creation. Other words are used for man in Hebrew, but Adam has a special use in the first few chapters of Genesis. Even after the fall, man is still referred to in Genesis 9:6 as adam (TWOT Vol. 1, p.10).

\(^3\) \textit{LHEDOT}, p.5
his slave, Adam became a slave to the *adamah*. The ground was God's possession and Adam was to act as God's servant, obediently maintaining the “...divinely created and intended relationships vertically and horizontally. As long as this condition was sustained, God caused the *adamah* to give its fruitfulness (blessing) to Adam.”

Before man was driven out of the Garden, “The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.” (Gen. 3:21) Eden was a place of complete protection and safety so that even clothes were not needed, because the glory of the Lord God was their covering. But sin, which severed the relationship between God and man, shut down Eden. In essence, the first sin built the first gate.

**The Gate of Eden**

On the east side of the Garden was placed “…cherubim and a flaming sword...to guard the way of the tree of life.” (Gen. 3:24) Here the first gate was placed, in order to keep man out of paradise. To this day, man is subconsciously aware of this sense of banishment and loss of protection.

The cherubim not only guarded the way to the Tree of Life, but also kept it. The Hebrew word used in Genesis 3:24 for “guard,” is *shamar*. It means to both keep and guard, that is, “to exercise great care over.” The cherubim were to protect what was holy, so that it could one day be opened again for man to return. If the gate were unguarded and the way was not kept, Adam would have had partaken of the tree of life after he had

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4 *TWOT Vol. I*, p.11
5 *TWOT Vol. II.*, p.939
sinned. Due to Adam's sin nature and the power of the Tree of Life, he would have lived in continuous declining depravity and separation from God forever. Thus, out of love, God barred man from “…the way to the tree of life.”

The first gate placed at the entrance of Eden forever reminded man of the price of breaking covenant. It was a restraint upon mankind—a source of necessary frustration for a time—but, indeed, a temporary measure. As a tollgate remains shut until the toll is paid, so the first gate remained shut until Jesus approached this gate with his pierced body, paying the toll for all who follow the Way. Yet between Eden and Golgotha, the future of mankind headed on a different course under the curse of sin.

The First City

Sin always has consequences, and the severity of the consequences always outweigh the enjoyment. Yet sin provides God with an opportunity to show His mercy and His grace.

When Adam broke covenant with God, his relationship to the ground came under a curse. He was forced east of Eden to work the thorny ground, instead of reaching out his hand and receiving food as he did before. Adam now ate by the sweat of his brow. He had to irrigate the ground that was once watered by the dew and had to dig around the fruit that once had no other competition.

After being driven from Eden, Adam and Eve had a son, Cain, who became the founder of the first city. To better understand the origin of cities, we must take a closer look at the life of Cain.
Cain worked the soil instead of keeping flocks. He murdered Abel because “(T)he Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor” (Gen 4:4-5). In the fourth chapter of Genesis, Cain’s wicked nature is shown by his; rebellion (vs.3), anger (vs.5), deception and murder (vs.8), lying (vs.9), self-pity (vs.13), blame shifting and fear (vs.14).

The murder of Abel put Cain under a second curse—one of greater severity than the curse put on Adam. Part of the curse on Adam was “…by the sweat of your brow you will eat your food” (Gen. 3:19). The curse on Cain stated, “When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you” (Gen. 4:12). “So Cain went out of from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden” (Gen. 4:16). He became a “…restless wanderer on the earth” (Gen. 4:12). He could no longer farm, because the adamah no longer yielded fruit.7

The Mark of Cain

A curse was placed upon Cain and he responded to the Lord “...whoever finds me will kill me” (Gen. 4:14). “Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him

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6 Cain’s grain offering was contrary to God’s set pattern of blood offerings and was, thus, the first example of man attempting to substitute a religious activity for an ordained one.
7 The Lord said to Cain that the adamah, “...opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand” (Gen. 4:11). Now the ground withheld its blessing to Cain so to be in obedience to God. Solomon speaks of God who will, “…hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14). The land needs healing due to sin. Paul said, “…the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom. 8:20,21).
would kill him” (Gen. 4:15). As Adam and Eve were shown mercy and covered with the skins of animals, so Cain was given a mark. Cain's mark would calm his two primary fears: the fear of wandering and the fear of being killed. The mark was placed upon him for protection and would bring seven-fold vengeance upon anyone who murdered him.⁸

Most scholars agree that there is not a clear understanding of Cain’s mark. The word in Hebrew for mark, 'ôt, first occurs in Gen. 1:14 in regard to the luminaries marking the times and seasons. The same word is used to describe a “sign” or “marking” of covenant, i.e., the rainbow (Gen. 9:12-13,17) and circumcision (Gen. 17:11). The Sabbath is also described as a sign (Ex. 31:13, 17) or mark. Most of the occurrences of the word 'ôt refer to miraculous signs such as the plagues inflicted upon the Egyptians, the igniting of the food before Gideon (Judg. 6:17) and the shadow advancing upon the steps of the palace steps (2 Kings 20:9). According to the TWOT, page 18, it:

...either signifies the unusual event itself or in someway points to that unusual event. Or it may point backward to a historical event such as the stones in the Jordan (Josh. 4:6), or even forward to such a promise as a thornless future world (Isa. 55:13).⁹

The 'ôt placed upon Cain implies a special sign and marking that will make a difference in the history of mankind. In my opinion, it was the gifting to build a city, a place of protection, and it was a sign of God’s mercy to Cain. Hence, he would be able to shelter other evildoers as himself. The mark was a sign

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⁸ Josephus says “And when he was afraid that in wandering about he should fall among wild beasts…” (See Whiston’s Josephus Complete, p.27) The mark is mentioned here as the source of protection for Cain from the wild beasts instead of fellow man.
⁹ TWOT Vol. 1, p.18-19
of deliverance from death, fear and wandering—a walled city (which was the fruit of the mark) would act as an 'ot to its citizens. The chronology of events adds credence to this conclusion.

Even in the face of this horrible act, God extends His hand of mercy to Cain, giving him the grace to deal with the consequences of his sin in hopes of restoring fellowship with Cain and his descendants. The Bible points to God as One who “…devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from Him” (2 Sa. 14:14).

Cain's fear of being killed implies that the earth had other murderous inhabitants at that time. The building of the first city may not have been in rebellion as many conclude, but instead in obedience to the call of God on Cain's life. Yet obedience was not in Cain’s nature and he was once again unfaithful to his calling and gifting. Cain left the presence of the Lord without a repentant heart. Josephus, a noted Jewish historian, remarked concerning the events after Cain's sin:

*And when Cain had traveled over many countries, he, with his wife, built a city... However, he did not accept his punishment in order to amendment, but to increase his wickedness; for he only aimed to procure everything that was for his own bodily pleasure, though it obliged him to be injurious to his neighbors.*

God gifted Cain, but his gift was not used for God. “*For the gifts and callings of God are without repentance*” (Rom. 11:29 KJV). This is often the pattern of mankind—using the

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10 Whiston's *Josephus Complete*, p.27
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gift of God but forsaking the will of God. As the Apostle John writes:

**Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's righteous** (1 John 3:12).

The Hebrew word for city, יֵר (yir), refers to a place guarded by waking or a watch. The reason cities were developed was for the purpose of watching, guarding and protecting its inhabitants. The Hebrew word, יֵר (yir), not only means city but also anger, wrath and also distress and anguish. The first יֵר (yir) was founded in the emotional state of יֵר (yir). Cain sought not only build a city but to build a new, godless Eden. Josephus goes into detail regarding Cain:

He augmented his household substance with much wealth, by rapine and violence; he excited his acquaintances to procure pleasures and spoils by robbery, and became a great leader of men into wicked courses. He also introduced change in that way of simplicity wherein men lived before, and was the author of measures and weights. And whereas they lived innocently and generously while they knew nothing of such arts, he changed the world into cunning craftiness. He first of all set boundaries about lands; he built a city, and fortified it with walls; and he compelled his family to come together to it...  

Cain operated under fear. The spirit of fear seeks to build walls of protection from God instead of a place of refuge for those seeking the eternal God. St. Augustine wrote these words in 413 CE:

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11 The Chaldean word יֵר (yir) means a watcher, angel or guardian. *LHEDOT*, p.247
12 Whiston's *Josephus Complete*, p.27
12
For Cain begat Enoch, in whose name he built city, an earthly one, which was not from home in this world, but rested satisfied with its temporal peace and happiness. ...Enoch means "dedication" for the earthly city is dedicated in this world in which it is built...\(^{13}\)

While Cain was building this city, his wife gave birth to a son. The first city was named Enoch after Cain's eldest son. Interestingly, Cain's brother, Seth, also had a descendant by the name of Enoch. Their lives will teach us an eternal lesson.

The Two Enochs

Following the generations of Cain and Seth respectively, the names of each generation are similar and sometimes even identical. Yet the seed of Cain and the seed of Seth represent opposing generations, one that is evil and one that is good. This opposition is clearly seen in the name of Enoch.

Enoch, the descendant of Seth “...walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away” (Gen. 5:24), while Enoch, the descendant of Cain, was dedicated to this world system. Dedication to this world brought forth a temporal, evil abode; dedication to God brought forth an eternal, heavenly home.

Soon Adam's descendants multiplied and “...the Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time” (Gen. 6:5). God also saw how, “...the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by

\(^{13}\) St. Augustine, *The City of God*, p.503.
them” (Gen. 6:4). Because sons of Seth were interbreeding with the daughters of Cain, the seed that would soon crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15) was in danger of being destroyed.¹⁴

Antediluvian cities—the cities of Cain’s sons—had spread corruption and violence instead of God's original purpose for them and threatened God’s eternal purpose for redemption. Man's sinful nature perpetuated this cycle of destruction, most notably shown in the narratives about Nimrod and the Tower of Babel. So God said, “I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth... But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen. 6:7,8). Through a great flood God chose to destroy the wicked. Yet Noah and his family, from the line of Seth, would be spared.

The Tower of Babel

Josephus writes regarding the flood that some of the inhabitants of the earth “…were greatly afraid of the lower grounds on account of the flood.”¹⁵ They were afraid that God would again flood the earth due to their sinfulness and thus desired to be prepared. Without trust in God or faith in His promises, they made this declaration in Genesis 11:4: “Come let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we can make a name for ourselves and not be

¹⁴ Some scholars interpret this passage referring to angels having relations with humans. This is interpretation is based on Job 1:6; 2:1 that refers to the “sons of God” (beni elohim) or angels that presented themselves before the Lord. Yet a closer analysis of the scripture reveals that “…the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose” (Gen. 6:2 italics mine). Jesus said, “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven” (Matt. 22:30 italics mine). If angels could not marry, the sons of God could not be angels.

¹⁵ Whiston's Josephus Complete, p. 30

¹⁵ The World's Last Mysteries, p.169
scattered over the face of the whole earth.” The tower that was built was known as the Babel—Bab-el meaning "gate of God". This building was probably similar to the temple towers that were known as "ziggurats". Based on archaeological evidence regarding ancient architecture of that region, it was probably an immense tower designed as series of platforms decreasing in size as it climbed. In Mesopotamia there were approximately 300 of these ziggurats, some reaching as high as 300 feet.¹⁶ At the top of these stood temples into which gods were believed to step on their way to an earthly dwelling place.

This structure was designed to be a "stairway to heaven." In contrast, Jacob in his dream, “…saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending down on it” (Gen. 28:12). Jacob later exclaimed, “...(T)his is the gate of God” (Gen. 28:17). The gate of Babel was material and man-made; the gate of Bethel was spiritual and God-given.

Jesus would later point to Himself as the ultimate “stairway to heaven”. He said, “I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (John 1:51).

Like Cain, the people of Babel decided to forsake the call of God for the vain and foolish goal of attempting to build a carnal path to a spiritual place. The fear of wandering continued to be their motivation, yet what they feared soon came upon them. “So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth and they stopped building the city” (Gen. 11:8).
What was the original plan for Babel? The plan of God for the city is revealed in the name of the city. Babel was purposed to be a gateway to God, yet the city’s population squandered their ability in the pursuit “…to make a name…” (Gen 11:4) for themselves.

As the Lord came down to visit the Tower, He said of the builders: “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them” (Gen. 11:6). Even though God commended their unity, He condemned their vision and scattered the people over the face of the earth.

Due to the scattering, many new civilizations were developed. Walled cities became the hub of political and economical activity of most if not all civilizations. The account of the Tower of Babel is an example of a city that did not accomplish the purpose of God. The next section explores God's plans for cities.
Chris Monaghan and his wife, Debbie, live near Richmond, Indiana, U.S.A. Chris and Debbie are the Senior Leaders of a group of believers in the Richmond area called Gateway Vineyard Fellowship. We focus on changing the atmosphere of our city through worship, teaching and humanitarian acts. Gateway seeks to create a movement centered on revival that flows out of our new identity in Jesus as sons and daughters in the kingdom of God. Chris and Debbie expect supernatural happenings whenever and wherever the body of Christ gathers together and regularly see physical and emotional healings take place. They also serve as coordinators for Family Foundations International and promote the Ancient Paths Seminars in their region. Chris and Debbie are the proud parents of five happy children: four boys and one girl.
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