

The Promise to Abraham

“...and they shall possess the gate of their enemies” Gen.22:17

Jane Vaughn

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When you read the Bible “devotionally,” you’re not reading to *study* per se, but you still are reading to hear God’s voice. I was reading in Genesis, the stories of Abraham. In Chapter 22, we re-visit the event of Abraham’s offering of Isaac to the Lord. God saw that Abraham had withheld nothing from Him. In verse 17, God restates His promise of blessing and multiplication of Abraham’s descendants (seed). I found I had underscored the beginning phrases in an earlier reading, but this time, I *heard* something else. Isn’t God good? I had neglected the third aspect of blessing, the final phrase of verse 17: “*and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.*”

I immediately thought of spiritual warfare, and was delighted to find another scripture to add to my cache of warfare verses. Amazing truth! As the spiritual seed of Abraham, we Christians are rightful recipients of the blessings of Abraham. We can inherit these promises of God! So! If “I” (or any believer in Jesus Christ) possess the gate of “my” enemy, what does that mean? What is it that is significant about the gates? God impressed on me that the answer to these inquiries would be life-changing!

In ancient times, in Israel and other eastern cultures, the gates of a city were busy places – for the whole population. The gate was the place of important business transactions. Recall when Boaz, in the story of Ruth, wanted to do the right and “legal” thing for her, went to the elders who sat at the gate of the city (Ru.4:1). A life-altering business transaction occurred there that changed Ruth’s life forever. So, the gate was the **place of legal business transactions**. (see also Gen.23:10,18; Deut.21:19).

The gate was also the **place of justice**. Kings sat in the gate to meet with their subjects, and make legal decisions. Princes and judges sat at the gates and discharged their duties. Court was held there, disputes settled. Priests and prophets delivered discourses, admonitions, prophecies, and counsel at the gate. (2Kngs.7:1; 22:10; Neh.8:1,3; Jer.17:19,20; 36:10; 38:7).

It was the **place of public speaking**. The people gathered at the gate – or in the courtyard of the gate – for conversation, to share local news, and for discussions of all subjects. It was a likely place for people to congregate informally or formally because of the normal construction (massive vaulted stone structures often with covered courtyards) that offered a cool place to escape the heat of the deserts in the Mideast. It was a **place of rest** as well.

Furthermore, the gates and the vicinity around them served as the **marketplace** of the town (2Kngs.7:1). This was the best location for the sale of local produce and crops as everyone who passed through the city had to enter and exit through the gate. The gate to a city was a busy place.

The gate became a symbol of strength, power, and dominion (Ps.24:7), but it was also the weakest point of defense (2Chr.14:7; 26:9; 32:5; Ps.48:12) and therefore heavily defended. Watchtowers were constructed above the corners of the gates as lookout posts – a place where watchmen could see when an enemy was approaching and call the city to alert. At night the gates were closed, barred and guarded (Josh.2:5,7; Neh.7:3), secured by locks with big keys.

To possess the gate was to possess the city! The Israelites, the seed of Abraham, were promised power or dominion over the cities of their enemies (Gen.22:17; 24:60).

Here was my initial thought concerning spiritual warfare: this Scripture in Genesis seems to be quite important – a divine Truth, if you will. In natural wartimes, to possess the gate meant possession of the city and we know – as it goes in the natural, so it goes in the spiritual. An awesome thought! So – if ***I*** possess the gate of the enemy, he has no business messing with me! I am the seed of Abraham – I’ve

been bought and washed by the Blood of Jesus Christ – I am a child of the King – I possess the gate of the enemy. Hallelujah! Victory is assured through the promise of God!

The next day, God brought me back to this glorious verse. What He revealed was, I think, even more extraordinary and personally freeing than the first part of the revelation! He reminded me that I am, too often, my most fierce “enemy!” I had to agree. (Does that fit you as well?) More times than not, our biggest battles are with our own personages.

Who I am today is a result of years of life-events. We have a whole history of experiences behind us, both positive and negative – and, unfortunately, we seem to allow the negatives of our past to dictate more often and more powerfully than all of the positives put together. We are subconsciously controlled by lingering and unresolved hurt feelings, slights, rejections, unforgiveness, camouflaged resentments or bitterness, and the memory of hurtful “words” spoken to us, against us, or about us.

I believe a legitimate extension of the scripture in Genesis can be applied to the battles I have with *myself* – my known weaknesses, my past (that stretches into my present), my self-image (often formed based on words others have said), my goals (visions and dreams for the future), my perceptions of events (past and present), and my self-talk (the conversation I have all day long with myself). I believe we can say, GOD SAYS – I possess my own gates – or, I CAN possess them! It is through His revelation, His power, His enabling, His everything-I-need – but I can take hold of my own gates and possess my own “city” – I have that right. I am not a “victim” of my past or present circumstances.

I am a *city*, if you will. I possess my gates. You are a city – and if you are born again you can possess your gates. We can control who (or what) enters in through our gates. Jerusalem had 15 gates at one time, and they each had a name. The name often reflected the major use of a gate or something in particular about it. For instance, the Sheep Gate, near the Pool of Bethesda, was the primary entrance through which sheep were brought to the Temple for offerings. The East Gate was on the eastern wall.

In the Bible, gates are spoken of as being *broken* indicating an inability to perform their function. They were *removed* meaning there was no defense against invasion. They were *burned* – marred, scarred – by an enemy of the past when the defenses were breached. And they were *barred* indicating a guarded and defended wall. Nehemiah returned with the people of Israel (a remnant of the whole) and began to rebuild the walls (that would be the physical security surrounding a city – they were tall and thick and made of stone). Then they had to repair the gates and hang them in their fortified places.

If I can see myself as a city – what would be my *gates*? First of all, my eyes are like gates. They allow things to “come in.” It has been suggested that everything we see is logged or filed in the brain somewhere for later retrieval. That can be good, or it can be very detrimental. I need to be careful what I allow my eyes to let into my soul. If I look at pornography? What about read trashy books? Or R-rated movies that have that rating for a reason – which the *world* has decided is racy or violent, at best. What am I filling up on through my eyegates?

Jesus said, “*The light of the body is the eye; if, therefore, thine eye be light (or “healthy”), thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be defective (or “evil”), thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!*” (Mt.6:22,23). Case in point – I am reminded of the little Sunday School song, “Oh, be careful little eyes what you see!” That’s so true.

James said, “*But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when that lust has conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death*” (Jas.1:14,15). Lust is an intense craving or longing, especially for what is forbidden. We usually think in terms of sexual impurity when we speak of lust, but we can actually lust for power, or things, or whatever we believe will satisfy our cravings. “*Lust when it is conceived...*” Where is something “conceived” – an idea? A thought? It usually comes from something we have taken in through our eyegates.

We could look at most of our 5 senses as gates. Our **ears** – what we hear – listen to – record in our memories through hearing. We know that “*faith cometh by hearing, hearing the Word of God*” (Rom.10:17). So, it is not the gate that is “evil” – it is the unguarded gate, the broken gate, the open gate that we must be careful to watch. Be your own watchman – on the walls. Don’t allow just anything to come into your being unchecked and unchallenged.

Have you considered “passive learning?” I understand that to be what we *learn* by passive experience – by simply being *exposed* to things of life – not in a formal learning environment. I see a grave danger here in things like background music – the radio playing softly in the background would be an example. Instrumental music or a Christian station would not be a threat, but just leaving contemporary stations (including the “oldies!”) playing in elevators or stores or doctors’ offices or in your car – or in a plug from one’s ear to an iPod – being exposed to the lyrics of certain types of music can and does *desensitize* us to the dangers being lodged in the subconscious. Extreme position? I doubt it. Really.

Women should guard their eargates from exposure to gossip. You can receive prayer requests without having to know all the gory details. Men should be watchful concerning the kinds of humor that pervades the masculine arena. We’re admonished (advised) by Paul to not participate in certain kinds of activities. He lists some of them in Ephesians 5, beginning at verse 3. We would expect to (and do) discover the obvious: *immorality, impurity, greed*. But he continues in the next verse (v.4): “*there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.*” People know that’s wrong. My husband and I even have had people apologize to us *before* they tell a crude joke that’s supposed to be funny! I mean people *in the church*, but not in a church setting.

Guard your ears. Be aware of what’s lying in wait for you in terms of passive hearing. Passive in the fact that you do not actively participate or seek it out – but you hear it all the same. Ask God to cleanse you from that exposure and do not allow such things to cause you to compromise a righteous life-choice.

The **mouth** – a gate. Things particularly come **out** of our mouths about which the Lord cautions us. In Matthew 12, speaking to the Pharisees Jesus says, “*For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things, but I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account of it in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned*” (verses 34-37). That is quite a statement, and gives us good reason to guard what sort of communication leaves our lips. James says it this way: “*Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.*”

What about guarding what *enters* the mouthgate? I had never thought of this – ever – until the Lord opened my eyes to it just this week. We could think in terms of illegal drugs or alcohol – or – I have struggled with my weight for 50 years! That’s a lifetime of losing battles... It is the one area of my life that I have consistently been defeated. I’ve tried diets that work while you’re actively on them – I’ve counted calories and carbs and fats and sugar.... I’ve tried various forms of strenuous exercise (competitive racquetball, swimming laps, jogging, etc.) – same thing. As soon as you let up at all... defeat. I have begged God to work a miracle in my naturally sleepy metabolism. And I have shed a lot of tears over the failures. Just being honest here.

I have tried to deal with spiritual issues – current and past: abiding more, walking in the Spirit more, joined Bible studies on weight loss, and how to handle stress. I’ve tried facing the sins of self-indulgence and lack of self-control and lust for food, even greed. I have endeavored to do everything I could think of – I have confessed and repented and bound and cast out and attempted to crucify; I’ve even “let go and let God.” ☺ And, in this area, I have experienced no “lasting fruit” (Jn.15:16) over the long term – 50 years.

But – I never considered this aspect – of possessing this gate. I can only hope this is the key for ME that God has finally granted. I know it is Truth! (Jn.8:32). And I’m on to it! ☺ I’m now actively conscious

of what's going into my mouth. My **goal** is to *possess the gate*. My hope and expectation is that I will experience the weight loss that has eluded me thus far.

We also could talk about **heart** issues as *gates* – what do I store up in my heart as treasure? What do I store up that's *not* treasure? How have I established my life priorities? We could even discuss our **hands** and **feet** as forms of gates... What do I do that gets me into trouble? Where do I go? What do I neglect? How do I spend my leisure time? How do I fill my day? And I think as important as any is the **mind**. What are you listening to? Whose voice are you heeding? Are you capturing your thoughts and checking them against the things God would say?

Gates. Do I actually *possess* my own gates? It is my inheritance as the seed of Abraham. It's my "right." It's my privilege. It's MY responsibility. I know that *occupation* of the enemy's land is a process (De.2:31). I know the Israelites were to leave "no survivors" when they went in to possess the Land (De.2:34). I know we must bring every thought captive and make them bow to the Kingship of Jesus (2Cor.10:4,5). I know the Promise of God to the Israelites was that He would *give* them the Land, but they had to go in to *possess* it, and that meant battles. Victory was sweet – defeat was devastating.

God promised them, "*I will be with you, I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and of good courage...*" (Josh.1:5b-6a). Let's remember that the fulfillment of the promises of God is accomplished by meeting the conditions indicated. In Joshua, there were these instructions to the Israelites: "*...that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses, My servant, commanded thee; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper wherever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for the LORD thy God is with thee wherever thou goest.*" (Josh.1:7-9). Notice "then."

That is Old Testament – old covenant – under the Law. Thank God we live this side of the Cross! We are not to be bound by the legalisms of "religion" (Gal.5:1). So what is it *we* have in common with *them*? I believe the similarities are that we are to love God with our whole hearts. And that means *we're* to follow in the ways of Jesus – out of love and gratitude for all He has provided for us. Be like Jesus, relying only on what the Father says and does and directs. Then we shall walk in the inheritance that belongs to us – including possessing the gates of our enemies!