

EXPLORATION: BIBLE

By Chip Thompson

#10 Archeology of the Bible – Jerusalem's Magnificent Walls

All who see Old City Jerusalem today are awed by its magnificent stone walls. Jerusalem's fortification walls are 2.5 miles long, they have an average height of 40 feet, and are over 8 feet thick. The wall has 34 watchtowers and 8 gates. Jerusalem is an impressive ancient fortress. These walls, however, are only 485 years old. They were constructed by an Arab who called himself, Suleiman the Magnificent.



THE WESTERN WALL OF OLD CITY JERUSALEM
– [Photo by Chip Thompson, 2022]

In ancient times, city walls were built to protect the local inhabitants from invading enemies. The question is, “Was it possible to build a wall that could defend against all enemies?”

The first mention of Jerusalem, as a fortified city, is in 1406 B.C. when Joshua and the Israelites conquered the land of Canaan. Joshua 15:63 says, “As for the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem to this day.” In this case, the city walls did their job and the local Canaanite people survived the initial invasion of Israel. But, 400 years later, in the days of King David, a weakness in the wall fortifications (a water shaft) caused the downfall of the city. David's men breached the wall and conquered the city. In about 1,000 B.C., Jerusalem became the capital of the nation of Israel.

In the late 8th century B.C. Jerusalem was the only walled city in Israel that survived what is known as the Assyrian conquest. The Bible says King Sennacherib, “came up against all the walled cities of Judah and took them” (Isaiah 36:1). His mighty

army would certainly have taken Jerusalem as well, if not for Yahweh God's miraculous intervention. [Read this story in Isaiah chapters 36-37]. The strong walls of Jerusalem protected its people for another century, but in 586 B.C., Jerusalem was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. The walls built to protect Jerusalem's inhabitants failed and Israel was carried away captive.



THE DAMASCUS GATE IN JERUSALEM'S NORTHERN WALL:
In biblical times, this gate opened onto the road that led to Damascus, Syria. - [Photo by Chip Thompson, 2022]

Following seventy-years of captivity in Babylonian, a group of Jews were allowed to return and rebuild the fallen walls of Jerusalem. Over the next 400 years as Jerusalem grew, the walls were expanded and fortified like never before. King Agrippa, at the time of Claudius Caesar, strengthened Jerusalem with a wall that was just under 40 feet tall, and 15 feet wide. Jerusalem's weakest point, the northern side of the city, had ninety defensive towers. Yet, when Jewish Zealots revolted against Rome in 70 A.D., the 10th Roman Legion breached its fortifications and the city was destroyed. The strong walls built by mortal men to protect the Jewish people once again failed miserably.

This brings us to an interesting story about the existing wall built by Suleiman the Magnificent. Shortly after rebuilding Jerusalem's wall, Suleiman ordered the Eastern Gate to be permanently blocked shut. [See: the blocked gate in the center of the photo below]. Why block a gate that had just been built? The answer is simple – Suleiman was trying to protect his people, now Arab inhabitants of Jerusalem, from an invading force. He had been told of a future Jewish Messiah who was believed

by both Jews and Christians to be the King of all Kings. This Messiah King, as prophesied, would one day enter Jerusalem through the Eastern Gate and set up his earthly kingdom in Jerusalem. So, Suleiman blocked the gate thinking he could keep the King of all Kings from entering. How many of you think Suleiman's efforts to keep the Jewish Messiah from entering Jerusalem's Eastern Gate could possibly work?



THE EASTERN WALL OF JERUSALEM
– [Photo by Chip Thompson, 2022]

We can all learn a lesson from Jerusalem's history. Just as the walls of Jerusalem were never able to protect its people, even so, walls we might try to build can never ultimately protect us. We don't build walls of stone, instead we build walls to insure ourselves against ruin. We pay dearly for health, home, car, and life insurances hoping to avoid the inevitable. All our feeble attempts to avoid ultimate ruin, however, are futile because we are all mortal.

Only one person who has ever lived was able to conquer mankind's greatest enemy which is death. In the Bible, 1 Corinthians 15 is called the ‘Resurrection Chapter.’ This chapter explains the Gospel or the Good News. It explains how only King Jesus has been victorious over mankind's greatest enemies. Verse 26 tells us, “The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.” Because Jesus died and rose again, defeating death, only he can offer us eternal life. The Apostle John says, “This is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:11-13). If you want to insure yourself against ultimate ruin, turn to the only person who has defeated death and that is Jesus. Only He can give you the free gift of eternal life.