

The Old Castle

Jacob was visiting the city of Suwon in South Korea. He had heard about a giant fortress there that was a bit of a hike, and he wanted to see it. Hwaseong fortress was only a bus ride away from where he was staying, so he got up early to go see it.

In Korea, the buses are cheap and efficient. They run often, and people don't mind riding them as much as a lot of people do in America. A subway also ran nearby, so he could have taken that, but the bus was a more direct route, and he could sit down. If he rode on the subway, he'd likely have had to stand up the whole way, and he already planned on walking!

His first impression of the fortress was a mixed one. He was dropped off in the middle of the city, a few blocks from the place. Amidst the rush of traffic and modern buildings, it was hard to see more than the roof of a large gate from where he stood. It seemed disappointing – not at all what he expected of a large castle. Yet, as he approached on foot, it quickly grew in size and scope.

It was different than he imagined. He'd expected a towering castle with walls and threatening arrow slits, like you saw in a fantasy movie. Instead, it was like a long snake, wrapping its tail through the city, up hills, and around the area. It seemed to go on forever, surrounding buildings and trees like a pair of giant swooping arms. He took a deep breath, and passed through the large gate.

Once inside, he found some giant steps that seemed not very fun to climb. He powered up them and got to the top of the wall. It was only about 15 or 20 feet up where he climbed, but some parts were much higher. Still, looking down and around he could see how the city had grown around these walls. It was nice that they hadn't torn them down to make way for apartments and other buildings. He started to walk, enjoying the view of the modern on the outside and the old on the inside.

If he thought it was an easy walk, he had something to learn. The whole track around was nearly four miles. It was unbelievable to think of all the manpower it must have taken to building this snaking set of walls, towers, and gates that wrapped around the hills and even crossed a river. He tried to imagine people two or three hundred years ago carrying wheelbarrows of rocks and dirt, lifting heavy blocks, and sweating to make this place.

He continued to walk, feeling like a sentry guard from long ago. He saw the secret gates hidden in the walls. He saw small towers and gun turrets, where soldiers would have held off attackers. There were pavilions and towers where soldiers must have gathered. A giant drum and a bell must have signaled important things to the people within the walls and those guarding them. The floodgates near one of the gates were guarded waterways, and there were small settlements of old buildings where kings, princes, diplomats, and important nobility once lived.

It was a great experience, looking around. It was a great workout, too! Jacob loved seeing Hwaseong Fortress, and looked forward to exploring more of Korea's past by visiting castles, monasteries, palaces, and temples.



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Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. What is Jacob visiting?
 - A. a fortress
 - B. a palace
 - C. a monastery
 - D. a temple

2. TRUE OR FALSE: Jacob was a bit disappointed when he first arrived.
 - A. True
 - B. False

3. What is one way the fortress surprised Jacob?
 - A. It was much older than he thought.
 - B. It was much smaller than he thought.
 - C. The wall was a lot longer than expected.
 - D. It was huge and tall and scary.

4. How does Jacob feel as he walks the walls?
 - A. Tired, bored, and a little bit thirsty...
 - B. He imagines what it would be like to build them or to be a guard long ago.
 - C. He imagines what it must have been like to be an attacker trying to get over the walls.
 - D. He feels hot and sweaty.

5. Which of these is NOT one of the places that Jacob wants to visit next?
 - A. a palace
 - B. a palace
 - C. a monastery
 - D. a garden

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