

HEZEKIAH'S TUNNEL

— TO CONVEY WATER FROM THE SPRING OF GIHON OUTSIDE THE CITY TO THE POOL OF SILOAM INSIDE THE WALLS OF THE CITY OF DAVID.

“Ye made also a ditch between the two walls for the water of the old pool: but ye have not looked unto the Maker thereof, neither had respect unto Him that fashioned it long ago.” Isaiah 22:11.



“This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper watercourse of Gihon, and brought it straight down to the west side of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all his works . . . and . . . he made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city . . .” II Chronicles 32:30; II Kings 20:20.

THE HISTORY AND DETAILS OF JERUSALEM'S DIVINELY—PROVIDED WATER SYSTEM.

GIHON means a gushing fountain. It was a perennial spring, gushing forth at intervals of hours to days, on the western escarpment of the Kedron Valley, just below Ophel, the ancient fortified tower of Jerusalem. (II Chron. 27:3; 33:14), in the city of David. Sometimes called “**The Virgin’s Fount**” from the tradition that here Mary washed Jesus’ swaddling clothes.

The Canaanites dug a reservoir adjacent to the spring.

The Jebusites cut a 50 foot tunnel back into their city and made a small holding reservoir, accessible by a 125 foot descending channel to a spot where buckets could be let down a 40 foot shaft. This was the “gutter” climbed by Joab to conquer the city (II Sam. 5:6-8).

Later, David or Solomon made a surface canal to a pool just within the south-east extremity of the city; thus the references to the “Upper pool” and “conduit” in the time of Ahaz (Isaiah 7:3; 8:6).

Anticipating Sennacherib’s seige, Hezekiah took defensive actions. Isaiah pleaded with Israel that they rely upon Yahweh even in the midst of their industrious preparations. (Isaiah 22:9-11). The city was enlarged, walls strengthened, at the expense of demolished houses and water stored in an internal reservoir. The now celebrated Gihon-Siloam tunnel was commenced. Later, these defensive actions became subservient to a faithful reliance on Yahweh (see Psalm 46).

The tunnel, a remarkable engineering feat, was completed (II Kings 20:20; II Chron. 32:2-4, 30), Gihon was concealed from view. The Assyrians were barred access to it.

SILOAM = “sent” (John 9:7-11). The Pool of Siloam was on the eastern edge of Ophel, within the walls of the enlarged city and just inside the Fountain Gate (Neh. 2:14; 3:15; 12:37). Some claim the present pool dates from 5th Century AD and is about 450 feet short of the original. The overflow watered the King’s garden.

THE TUNNEL

Digging commenced from each end, and following the rock formation, dug a curving “S” tunnel which today is almost 1800 feet long and averages 6 feet high. The teams met almost pick-to-pick in the centre!

The present pool is 30 foot lower than the spring, and is outside the walls of the “Old City” which dates from Suleiman 1538.

THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TUNNEL

In all nature, water is essential to life. When Moses struck the rock, there flowed water abundantly for the temporal salvation of the children of Israel (Exod. 17:5-6). But this spiritual significance was the more important (I Cor. 10:1-4).

In Spiritual language water is the symbol of the Word of Life (John 4:10-14).

The priests drew water from the pool of Siloam and poured it on the altar “in the last day, that great day of the Feast” of Tabernacles, chanting the words of Isaiah 12:3—“With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation”, on the assurance that “Yah Yahweh is my strength and my song, He also is become my salvation” (V. 2). John records the words of the Lord Jesus as they did so—“If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water (John 7:37-39—and while the reference primarily is to Jesus himself, in a secondary sense it applies also to “him that believeth”).

King Ahaz rejected this same Gihon stream—that is, in symbol he rejected the Word of Life and salvation in Yahweh, “the waters of Shiloah that go softly” (Isaiah 7:3-4, 8:6).

But it was the same Gihon water that through faith gave sight to the man born blind when he obeyed the instruction of the Messiah to wash the clay from his eyes in the water of Siloam (John 9:1-7).

“Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” was the instruction of the Lord (v. 7). Clearly there was a connection between the pool of Siloam and the life-giving message of the Lord. Siloam received its water from Gihon, from the depths of the mountain of Jerusalem, “all my springs are in thee” (Psa. 87:7). The Psalmist used this providential stream as a figure of God’s covenanted protection and care; “There is a river, the streams whereof shall make the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God shall help her at the dawning of the morning” (46:4,5, R.V. marg.). This covenanted protection has been especially “sent” in the person of His Son, whose Word is a refreshing and life-giving stream. Thus the Pool of Siloam was a prophecy of the one to be sent, spoken of even earlier by Jacob when he spoke of Judah’s king as “Shiloh” that was to come (Gen. 49:10—a related word to “Siloam”).

When Jesus mixed the spittle with the clay he was in symbol mixing the Divine with the earthy. His spittle was associated with his mouth and his tongue, the source of his quickening Words of Spirit and life (Jn. 6:63; compare Mk. 7:38). The clay was always a symbol and reminder of the origin of man. (Gen. 2:7, Job. 33:6, 34:15). So the union of these two spoke of God’s means of salvation in which “**the Word was made flesh**, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14).

The Siloam Pool had exactly the same connotations. It arose in the Divine plan, **from God**, according to His love and wisdom and “gushed forth” as a stream of life (how interesting and significant that Gihon is known in later times as “The Virgin’s Spring”) travelling silently and mysteriously through the ground, “sent” for the salvation of His people. Surely Isaiah summarises it beautifully, “Behold, **God is my Salvation . . . my Strength . . . therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation**” (12:2-3).

THE DISCOVERY OF HEZEKIAH'S TUNNEL IN RECENT TIMES.

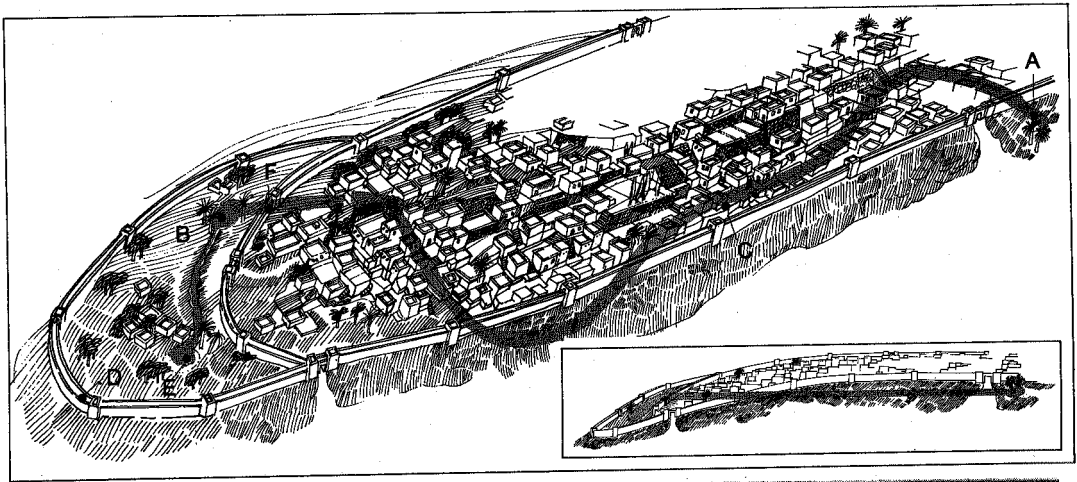
In 1880, a boy wading in the Siloam Pool accidentally came upon an inscription on the Tunnel Wall, 19 feet back from the Siloam end. There were six lines of ancient Hebrew script, which in due course were deciphered—

“The boring through is completed. And this is the story of the boring through. While the workmen were hacking their way from opposite ends, and while there were still three cubits to be bored through, they heard voices calling from each side, for there was a crevice in the rock.

And on the day when the boring was completed, the stone-cutters hacked their way towards each other until they met. Then the water flowed from the spring to the pool twelve hundred cubits, and the height of the rock above the heads of the stone-cutters was a hundred cubits.”

Hezekiah's Tunnel: Dug to Save a City

When Jerusalem's water supply was in danger of being cut off by invading Assyrians, King Hezekiah ordered a tunnel dug from the Spring of Gihon to a reservoir inside the city. Using simple tools, workers hewed their way through about 1750 feet of solid limestone.



One team of tunnelers began at the Spring of Gihon (A) outside Jerusalem, and another worked from the Pool of Siloam (B) to the south, hacking through the stone until they met (C). The floor was cut out to increase the flow of water toward the lower end (inset), so the height of the waterway varies from 4 to 20 feet. The city wall was extended (D) to enclose the reservoir and its overflow (E). Water still flows through Hezekiah's tunnel which was a major engineering feat for its time. The completion was described in an inscription placed in the tunnel wall (F). This plaque is one of the few important surviving fragments of ancient Hebrew writing.

