

# HEZEKIAH'S TUNNEL

**Gihon Spring.** Jerusalem is the city that David selected for his capital and the place where God chose to put his name. An ancient city had to have a good water supply and formidable defense. Jerusalem had both from the valleys that surrounded it: the Kidron Valley on the east, the Tyropoean Valley on the west, and the Hinnom Valley on the south. The Gihon Spring was the main water supply, located on the city's eastern slope above the Kidron Valley.

In Hebrew, Gihon means "bursting forth" or "gushing," which refers to the intermittent flow of the spring. It was not a steady flow, but varied with the seasons and the annual rainfall. The Gihon Spring was fed by groundwater that collected in a subterranean cave. Once the cave was full, it emptied up through the cracks in the rocks, surfacing to accumulate in a pool. The spring also watered the terraced area to the south known as the "King's Garden" (2 Kings 25:4; Neh. 3:15; Jer. 52:7).

**Canaanite Water Tunnel.** Traditionally, it has been understood that in the Canaanite period, before Israel controlled Jerusalem (Jebus), there was a series of tunnels that led from an entrance inside the city to the Gihon Spring. This system had four sections: (1) a stepped tunnel, (2) a horizontal tunnel, (3) a vertical shaft that was over 40 feet high, and (4) a feeding tunnel from the spring. The theory has been that the Jebusites could safely access the city's water supply by walking through the stepped and horizontal tunnels, dropping buckets down through the vertical shaft, and drawing water from the feeding tunnel at the bottom.

The vertical shaft (#3) was discovered in 1867 by British engineer Sir Charles Warren. Since that time, it has been known as "Warren's Shaft." This "water shaft" has been viewed as the same one that David's men, led by Joab, used to gain entrance into the city (2 Sam. 5:8).

A second possibility is that Joab entered into the horizontal tunnel (#2) through an opening in the eastern hillside. The rare Hebrew term *tsinnor* in 2 Samuel 5:8 could be translated "water tunnel" (NASB) instead of "water shaft." After Israel gained control of the city, this entrance was apparently filled with rocks to prevent enemies from entering into the city.

A third option is that David's men went up through the pool emanating from the Gihon Spring, then through the horizontal and stepped tunnels. Archaeologists Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron have argued that Warren's Shaft was not connected to the horizontal tunnel or feeding tunnel during the Canaanite period, so it would have been impossible to use it as a means of entrance. They have proposed an alternative area—the natural pool—for drawing water (see *BAR* [Jan/Feb 1999]: 26).



Warren's Shaft



Eastern Hillside Entrance Filled with Rocks (Viewed from Inside Horizontal Tunnel)

In modern times, when the city of Jerusalem was preparing to construct a visitor's center, a surprising discovery was made of two massive towers with a very deep pool cut from rock between them. The towers were built to protect the Gihon Spring and the pool of water, denying access to them and guaranteeing a good water supply to the people in time of siege.



An Artist's Reconstruction of Towers Protecting the Gihon Spring and Pool

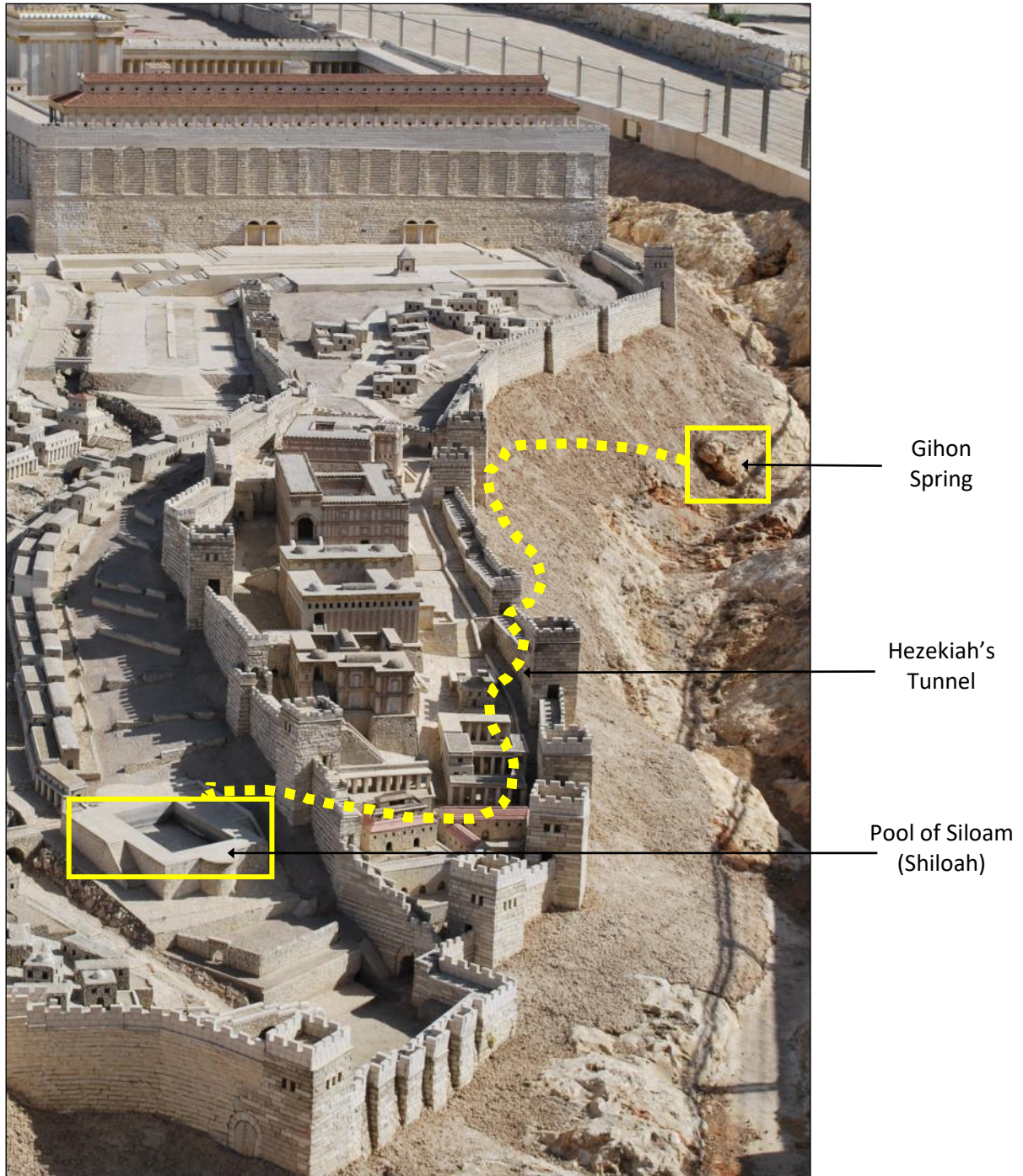
Some have proposed to construct a visitor's center above the towers and the pool. They would like to establish a park called the Garden of the King through which waters from the Gihon Spring could flow south along their original course.

***Hezekiah's Tunnel.*** One of the most fascinating engineering feats of ancient Israel was the construction of Hezekiah's Tunnel (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chron. 32:2-4). Hezekiah's men "blocked all the springs and the stream that flowed through the land" (2 Chron. 32:4). They "blocked the upper outlet of the Gihon Spring and channeled the water down to the west side of the City of David" (2 Chron. 32:30). The 1,750 feet tunnel was likely dug in order to survive the Assyrian attack of King Sennacherib in 701 B.C. (See Sennacherib's Prism in the *Lachish* section.) According to the Apocrypha, "Hezekiah fortified his city, and brought water into its midst; he tunneled the rock with iron tools, and built cisterns for the water" (Sirach 48:17; NRSV). He also repaired walls, built towers, and reinforced supporting terraces (2 Chron. 32:5).

In consideration of the Assyrian threat, every effort was made to complete the tunnel. The engineers cut through the rock from opposite ends simultaneously and met in the middle.

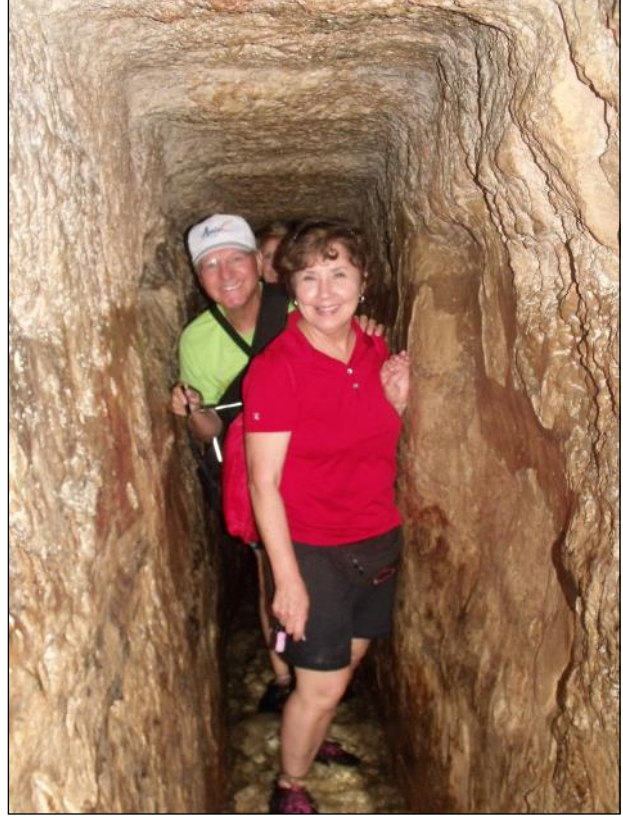


There are markings and irregular cuts on the walls that make it possible to identify where the two groups met near the tunnels' midpoint.



Hezekiah's Tunnel Illustrated on the Jerusalem Model





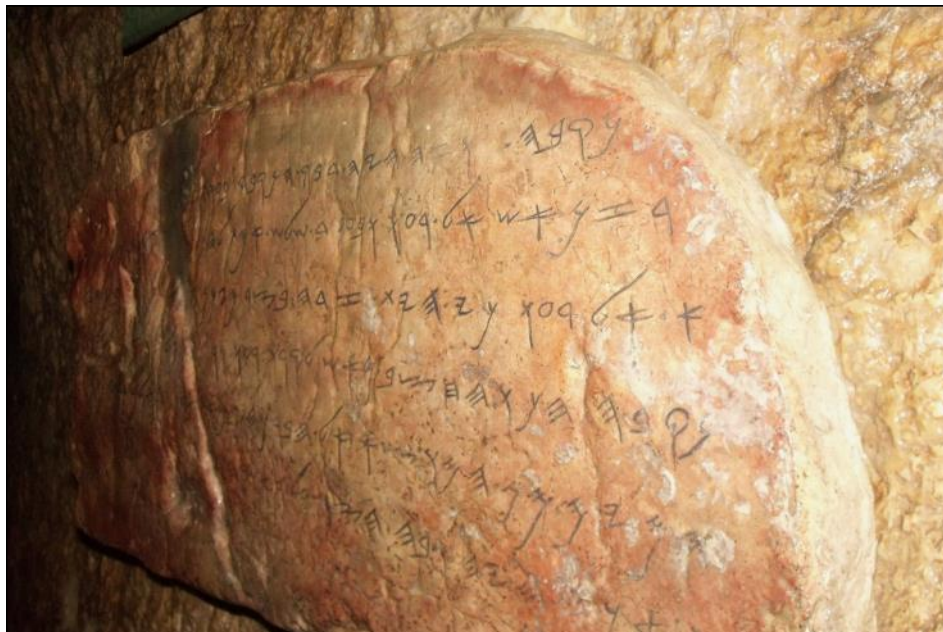
Hezekiah's Tunnel (Drs. Paul and Sherry Pollard)



In 1880, an inscription was found on one of the tunnel walls, closest to the Siloam Pool. It was discovered by a boy, Jacob Spafford, who was playing in the waters of the tunnel. The Siloam Inscription is about 27 inches wide and 12 inches high, and it contains six lines in Hebrew that describe the conclusion of the project and the meeting between the workers. An English translation reads:

[This is what happened when the tunnel] was driven through. And this was the way in which it was cut through: While [there were still men swinging] axes, each man toward his fellow, and while there were still three cubits to be cut through, [there was heard] the voice of a man calling to his fellow, for there was an overlap in the rock on the right [and on the left]. And when the tunnel was driven through, the quarrymen hewed the rock, each man toward his fellow, axe against axe; and the water flowed from the spring toward the reservoir for 1,200 cubits, and the height of the rock above the heads of the quarrymen was 100 cubits [adapted from *ANET*, 321].

The inscription was originally carved into the wall of the tunnel, but it was chiseled out by thieves, breaking it into pieces. An antiquities dealer in Jerusalem gained possession of them. The Ottoman Turkish Empire was in control of Palestine at that time, so they confiscated the inscription and took it to Turkey. It is now on display at the Museum of the Ancient Orient in Istanbul.



Siloam Inscription Replica (Inside Hezekiah's Tunnel)





Original Siloam Inscription  
(Museum of the Ancient Orient, Istanbul)

There have been questions raised as to why the inscription, which describes the meeting of the two groups, was found near the end of the tunnel, far from the meeting place described. Some speculative theories have been advanced, but there is no consensus. Interestingly, there are several more rock panels cut in different areas of the tunnel, which indicates that additional inscriptions were intended to be made.



Blank Rock Panel  
for Another Inscription

After Hezekiah's workers completed their labor, the water flowed from the Gihon Spring through Hezekiah's Tunnel to the Siloam Pool within Jerusalem's walls (see Neh. 3:15; Jn. 9:7). (See the section entitled *Siloam Pool*.)