

Hezekiah's Tunnel and the Siloam Inscription

2 Chronicles 32:

- 1 After these things, and the establishment thereof, Sennacherib king of Assyria came, and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fenced cities, and thought to win them for himself.
- 2 And **when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib was come**, and that he was purposed to fight against Jerusalem.
- 3 He took council with his princes and his mighty men **to stop the waters of the fountains which were without the city**; and they did help him.
- 4 So there was gathered much people together, who **stopped all the fountains, and the brook that ran through the midst of the land** saying,
Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water?
- 30 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.

2 Kings 20:20

And the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and all his might, and **how he made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city**,
are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

After the Assyrian capture of Samaria, refugees from Israel came to the south, to Judah. Its capital Jerusalem was expanded to the west. Recognizing that the city would one day be the target of renewed Assyrian aggression, the King Hezekiah (745 – 716 BC) prepared Jerusalem for a siege.

Sennacherib had already taken 46 cities of Judah and was ready to advance on the capital. However, Jerusalem was a well- fortified city. Its inhabitants were fanatical nationalists who were ready to fight to the death for their city and their God. Sennacherib was well aware of this and rather than risk losing many of his men in bloody battles, he decided to use an old and often successful method of subjugation. He would lay siege to the city and starve it into submission.

With the super-power Assyrians threatening his capital and his kingdom, Hezekiah consulted the prophet Isaiah. He attempted an alliance with the Babylonians, yet built a thick wall to secure Jerusalem's newer western neighborhoods. That wall, called the "broad wall" can be seen today in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City.

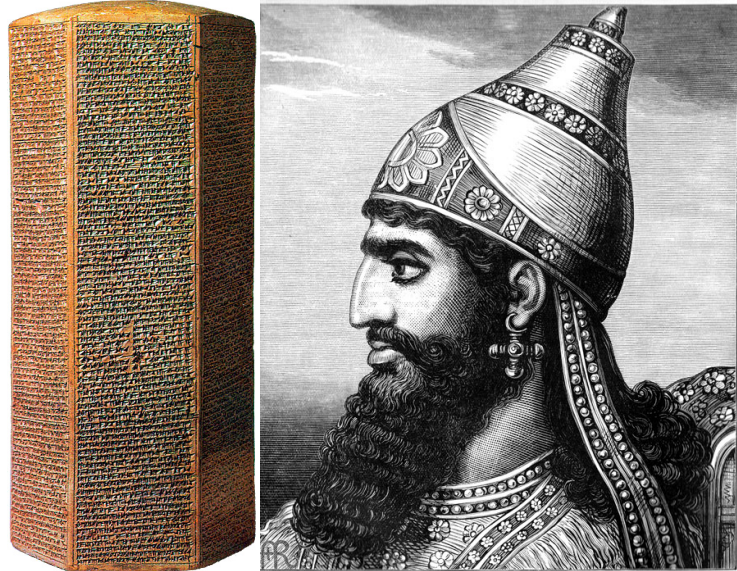


Accordingly Sennacherib sent messengers ahead in an effort to intimidate the people of Jerusalem.

*“Doth not Hezekiah persuade you to give over yourselves to **die by famine and by thirst**, saying, The Lord our God shall deliver us out of the hand of the King of Assyria? Know ye not what I and my fathers have done unto all the people of other lands? were the gods of the nations of those lands anyway able to deliver their lands out of mine hand?”* (2 Chronicles 32:11,13)

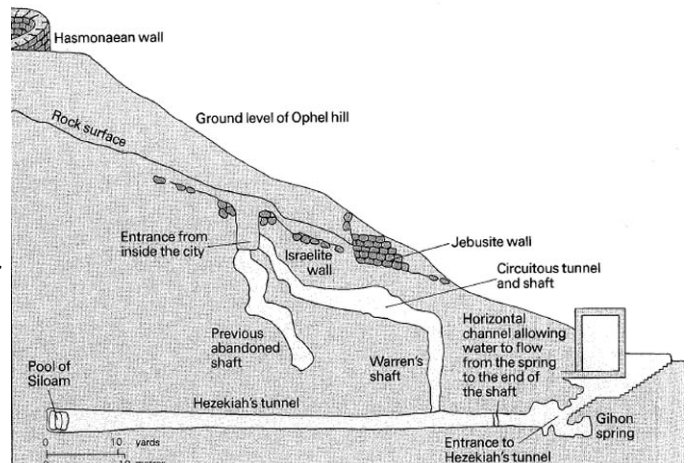
We know how Jerusalem survived. 2 Chronicles 32:21,22 records that divine intervention destroyed Sennacherib’s generals and officers causing him to return to his own land.

The best spin Sennacherib could place on his venture is inscribed on a cuneiform prism which recounts his boasting for the Judean military campaign. It’s on exhibition at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Sennacherib captured 46 towns and besieged Jerusalem. In Sennacherib’s words, “As to Hezekiah, the Judahite, he did not submit to my yoke.... I made [him] a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage.”



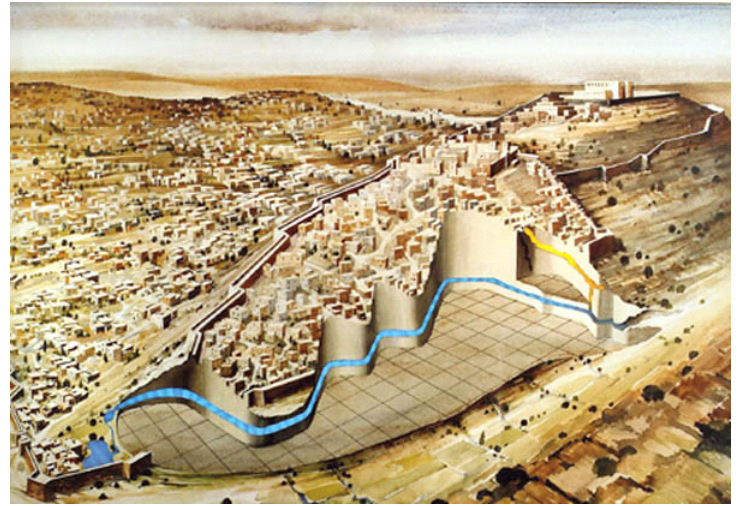
Jerusalem, like nearly all ancient cities, was built upon a mount. Near the base of the mount a never-failing spring supplied the city’s water. This spring, Gihon by name, was outside the city walls and close to the floor of the Kidron Valley. A pile of rocks could easily conceal the spring from enemy eyes but that would not allow the inhabitants of Jerusalem to obtain water.

Hezekiah commissioned his engineers to secure his water source by building a tunnel to divert the water from the Gihon spring over to the southwestern part of the city. The water, then, would be protected from the enemy and accessible from within the city. It’s believed that the tunnel could have been constructed within eight months, with one shift of tunnelers working by day and another by night. When Hezekiah’s reign is summarized in second Chronicles chapter 32, the tunnel is specifically highlighted as his greatest accomplishment.



The Gihon spring, situated in the Kidron valley east of the city, was hidden from sight, while a 533 meter long tunnel was cut (along a natural fissure) to make the waters flow into the city, to the pool of Siloam. Hezekiah’s tunnel measures 1760 feet, almost one third of a mile through solid rock. It is roughly 2 feet wide and in places 5 feet high and, because of the nature of the rock, does not run in a straight line.

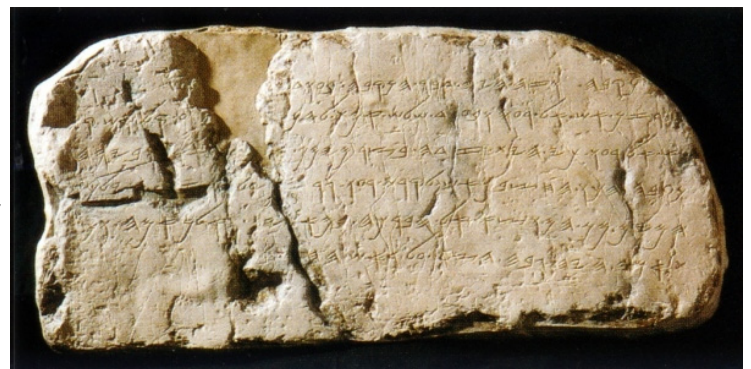
Hezekiah's tunnel dug through rocks was feeding water from the Gihon Spring out of the city to the Pool of Siloam in the city of David. This tunnel was discovered in 1838 by Edward Robinson and explored by Charles Robinson in 1867. It was not until 1880 that a youth wading in the tunnel noticed an inscription cut in the rock on the eastern side about 20 feet into the tunnel. The inscription was surreptitiously cut from the wall of the tunnel in 1891 and broken into fragments which were recovered through the efforts of the British Consul in and placed in the Istanbul Archaeology Museum.



The inscription in the tunnel in ancient Hebrew script explains that two teams, began at opposite ends and dug toward each other in the bedrock, and met. The script corresponds to ancient Hebrew script of this period, and is therefore additional proof of the dating of the tunnel. The inscription reveals 1200 cubits which confirms the Biblical measurement for a cubit to equal 18 inches as Josephus mentions in the construction of Herod's Temple.

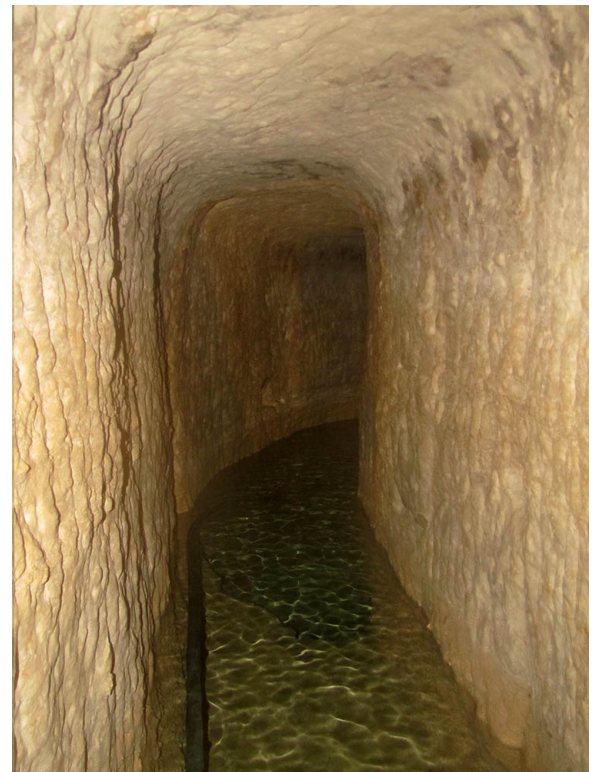
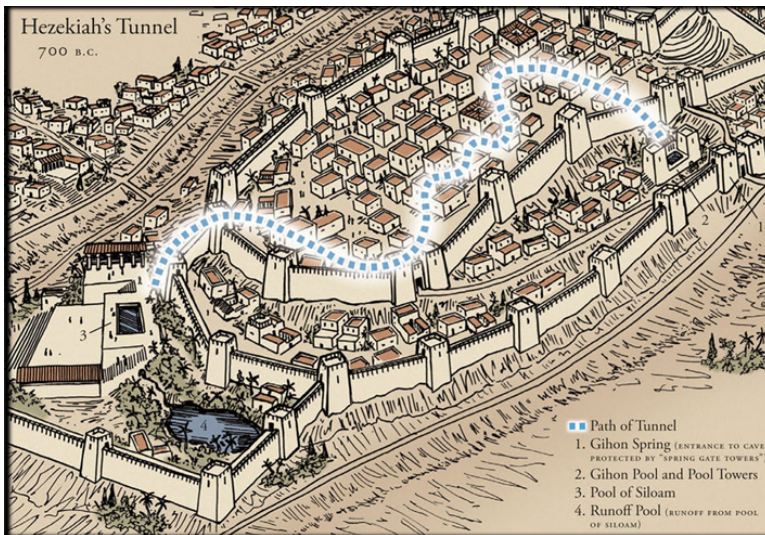
This inscription, the oldest Hebrew text written with the Phoenician alphabet, was cut in the rock on the side of the tunnel, near to the Siloam Pool end. It consists of six lines of different lengths. The translation of the inscription is as follows:

(ellipses indicate missing text)



... the tunnel ... and this is the story [the thing - "dvar"] of the tunnel while ... the axes were against each other and while three cubits [were left] to cut? ...the voice of a man ... called to his fellow, for there was a through-passage ["Zedah"] in the rock, from the right ... and on the day of the tunnel [being finished] the tone hewers struck [literally "hit"] each man towards his fellow, ax against [literally: "on"] ax, and the water went from the source to the pool for two hundred and a thousand cubits and one hundred (?) cubits was the height over the head of the stone hewers.

The attempt to discredit the Old Testament accounts and Jewish tradition received new impetus and political significance when the Palestinian Authority came into being under the Palestinian Authority, created as a result of the Oslo accords. The Mufti of Jerusalem, Ikrema Sabri, announced on more than one occasion that there was no evidence for Jewish presence in Jerusalem in ancient times, and Palestinian academics publish works that describe the entire tradition as "myths." The age of the Hezekiah tunnel was accordingly doubted and assigned by some to the Second Temple period, even though the script of the inscription is similar to that of older inscriptions of the time of Hezekiah. The double radiometric dating of the tunnel itself should be sufficient to convince reasonable authorities of the antiquity of the tunnel and of Jewish presence in Jerusalem during the period of the First Temple. It also vindicates the account in the book of Chronicles, and provides evidence that at least the chronicles were historical annals of the kings of Judea, supporting the claim that the ancient kingdoms of David and Solomon were historical fact.



Sources:

www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13662-siloam-inscription

www.itsgila.com/highlightsinscription.htm

www.kchanson.com/ANCDocs/westsem/siloam.html

www.biblicalarchaeologytruth.com/hezekiahs-tunnel.html

www.zionism-israel.com/dic/Hezekiahs_tunnel.htm



King Hezekiah's Royal Seal (Bulla) discovered in Ophel excavations south of Temple Mount in Jerusalem. First seal impression of an Israelite or Judean king ever exposed in situ in a scientific archaeological excavation. Discovery brings to life the Biblical narratives about King Hezekiah and the activity conducted during his lifetime in Jerusalem's 1st Temple Period Royal Quarter.

<http://new.huji.ac.il/en/article/28173>

www.keytodavidscity.com