

New Discoveries at the City of David - Jerusalem

Following Jesus from the Pool of Siloam to the Temple Mount



On the slope of the City of David hill, where the Kidron and Ben Hinnom Valleys meet, the Ancient Shiloah Pool was discovered just a few years ago. This magnificent pool was constructed 2,000 years ago during the days of King Herod, in Jerusalem's glorious building tradition. This grand pool served as an important meeting point for Jerusalem's pilgrims, who would arrive in the city to visit the Temple Mount on the three major Jewish holidays: Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkoth), and the Festival of Weeks (Shavuot). An impressive road once connected the Shiloah Pool to the Temple Mount and served as the central axis for all of Jerusalem's pilgrims and visitors.

Shops and businesses once lined the length of the Herodian Road and enjoyed the road's centrality and the wide exposure that they had to the many pilgrims who filled Jerusalem on the holidays. The way that leads from the Shiloah Pool in the direction of the Temple Mount reached 600 meters into the valley whose Greek name once was the "Tyropoeon" which means the valley of the cheese mongers. During the Hellenistic Period the road was lined with the shops and factories of dairy product manufacturers, such that when the winter rains would come, the valley would be washed clean of the refuse and smells that was a by-product of the dairy industry.

During Jerusalem's Herodian period the road was paved and at its foot, the Shiloah pool was formed in order to store water for drinking and for the bathing purposes of the visiting pilgrims. The road became more central and important because of the increasing pilgrimage phenomenon and because of

the importance of the Shiloah Pool in the culture of the pilgrims. Specifically, the Shiloah played a critical role in the Libation Ritual ceremony - during which the waters of the Shiloah Pool were brought as an offering at the Temple Mount itself. The pool of Siloam (Shiloah) has a very important place in the Christian world, for it is the place where Jesus healed the blind men, as we can read in **John 9, 7**, in the Christian Bible.

The excavations of the Herodian Road began just a few years ago and little by little that road has been revealed to us in all its glory. Abutting the road, a major drainage channel from the days of Herod has also been uncovered. The Herodian drainage channel, which runs beneath the Tyropoeon Valley, was first discovered at the end of the 19th century by the British Palestine Exploration Fund (P.E.F.). The channel was rediscovered during excavations conducted at the City of David by the Israel Antiquities Authority, under the direction of Prof. Ronny Reich from the University of Haifa. The drainage channel is over 700 meters long from the Temple Mount in the north to the Pool of Shiloah down south. It was essentially a manmade tunnel built underneath the Herodian Road whose ceiling was made up of the rectangular paving stones of the road above. Its purpose was to channel the water that flowed down the slopes of Mount Zion and the Temple Mount and to gather the water into a reservoir at the bottom of the valley. The drainage channel thus protected the road from flooding during the pilgrimage holidays and kept the pilgrims to the Temple Mount clean and dry. One of the most impressive things about the drainage channel is that it is not quarried out of stone, but rather, constructed at a standard that was unusual for its time – a tribute to a king for whom the quality of construction was everything.

The impressive tunnel was recently cleaned as far as the western wall of the temple mount, and today, it is possible to walk through it from the pool of Siloam to the western wall, and feel as the pilgrims of the 2nd temple period felt 2,000 years ago.

Sections of the Herodian Road itself have been excavated, and unique steps have been revealed along its length. These steps appear in a few places along the valley between the Shiloah Pool and the Temple Mount. The entire road is paved with smooth, wide, stone steps, which alternate between short and long in length. This design was intended to create a distinguished

ascent to the Temple Mount for pilgrims and to prevent running and indecent conduct when ascending to the Temple. Additionally, the unique arrangement of the steps allowed pilgrims to see both the Holy Temple and the steps in front of them intermittently during their ascent, creating a walking experience that was both safe and inspiring.

In the drainage channels beneath the road, impressive artifacts were discovered from the time of the Great Revolt against Rome. The channels themselves and the rare artifacts discovered bear a striking resemblance to the description of Josephus in his book "**Wars of the Jews,**" **Volume 6**, which tells the story of the Jews who hid "in the tunnels beneath the Shiloah." Thus, this new excavation was able to authenticate Josephus' moving historical description of the aftermath of the Revolt in Jerusalem.

Today, one can embark the tour in the Pool of Siloam, and walk up the Herodian ancient road continuing along the whole tunnel underground, experiencing a thrilling adventure, that takes you back in time.

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