



The Riddle of the Missing Rivers

*Historians and archaeologists claim to know the locations of Jerusalem's Biblical waterways. But do they really know? Using his detective's eye and a close reading of Biblical and rabbinic sources, **Rabbi Leibel Reznick** challenges established "facts."*

Scene I

WATERS OF BLESSING

Place: On the slopes of Jerusalem

Time: Circa 840 BCE

The young child is nervous as he rides down the rocky embankment on the richly adorned mule, replete with the trappings of royalty. It belongs to his father David, King of Israel. Nathan the Prophet, the judges of the Grand Sanhedrin, and Zadok the Priest follow slowly down the steep slopes of the hill. Zadok carries the flagon of holy Anointing Oil from the Tabernacle. A crowd of Israelites

Rabbi Leibel Reznick has prepared two web sites relating to Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. They are: <http://www.mikdash.com> and <http://www.campsci.com>. At the second website, click on Museum of the Bais HaMikdash. He is the author of The Holy Temple Revisited; Woe Jerusalem; A Time to Weep and The Mystery of Bar Kokhba. His most recent article for Jewish Action, "Snapshots from Tanach" appeared in the Winter 1997 issue.

watch from above as the procession proceeds down to the River Gichon.

Across the valley, near the Fountain of Rogel, Adoniyahu, another son of the aged King David, is celebrating. David is in failing health and unable to rule. No successor has yet been appointed. Adoniyahu, the oldest surviving son of David, proclaims himself to be that successor and is at this very moment celebrating his self-proclaimed ascension to the throne. But the celebration is a bit premature. Twelve-year-old Solomon, astride the king's mule, is leading the procession to his own coronation.

When the procession reaches the river Gichon, Zadok anoints Solomon, and proclaims him the legal successor to the Davidic throne of Israel. A shofar blasts and the people call out, "Long live King Solomon."

The procession turns and winds its way back up the steep hill to the city. The Israelites begin singing and dancing to the joyous tune of flutes. The jubilation is so great that the mountains reverberate to the sounds of celebration.¹

Our Sages taught that kings were to be anointed by flowing water as a sign of blessing that their sovereignty might endure as the flow of a river.²

Scene II

WATERS OF SUCCESS

Place: Inside the mountain slopes of Jerusalem

Time: Circa 540 BCE

The chalky, dust-filled air hangs like a fog in the tunnel. The leaping flames from the torches scorch the rocky ceiling a few inches above the workers' heads. The men chisel and hammer their way through the solid rock. Slowly, ever so slowly, the tunnel pierces the limestone. Porters fill wicker baskets with rock chips and hastily carry them outside the entrance to the tunnel. They are 160 feet below the surface of the mountain, standing in a foot of water on slippery rock. There is no fresh air, and the dizzying, frenetic light of the torches and the echoes of the hammers a thousand fold make the work almost impossible.

But this is no time to reflect about the impossible. An invading army has already crossed the border into the land of Judah. The tunnel must be completed before the invaders reach Jerusalem.

On the southern side of the mountain, another crew is chiseling and

hammering through the rock. They suffer the same hardships, but at least they stand on dry bedrock. The plan is to meet in the middle and join the two ends of the tunnel so that the water streaming into the northern end of the tunnel, which is located outside the city wall, will be channeled to the southern end, within the city wall. In the likely event of an enemy siege, Jerusalem's inhabitants then would have a constant supply of water.

But will the plan work? Will they meet? It is the plan of desperate men, but desperate times call for desperate plans.

Suddenly one crew stops its labors. Someone calls for silence in the tunnel. Now that it is quiet, they can hear the chink of metal on stone, the sounds of the other crew hammering away at the rock. There are only a few feet of stone separating the two crews. With renewed vigor, they resume their hammering. Soon a hole appears in the rock wall in front of them. A hand is thrust through the hole and the crew takes turns grasping and shaking the hand. The two crews meet. There is shouting and jubilation. The plan has worked — and before long, water flows through the tunnel from the northern end to the southern end, bringing precious water inside the city.

They all exit the tunnel from the southern end. About 20 feet from the end of the tunnel, one of the weary workers finds the strength to carve the story of their success on the stone wall. ³

Scene III

WATERS OF JOY

Place: The Holy Temple in Jerusalem

Time: Circa 20 BCE

The first day of the Sukkot holiday has ended. The Temple Courtyard is dark; only the dim light of the Altar's fire glows. In the adjacent Women's Courtyard, tens of thousands of festival pilgrims begin to assemble. The *Levi'im* stand on the steps that lead from the Temple Courtyard down into

the Women's Courtyard. They are tuning their instruments: harps, lyres, cymbals, and trumpets, so numerous they are impossible to count. A special gallery for the women is being set up. Young *Cohanim* enter the yard carrying huge flagons of oil. Shouldering the great flagons, they climb ladders going up to gigantic candelabras situated in the corners of the yard. They pour the oil into the bowls atop the candelabras, set wicks into the bowls and light them. Suddenly the Temple is ablaze with light. The entire city of Jerusalem is lit up. The celebration is about to begin.

Young men sing songs of praise to God with the same fervor as aged scholars. Aged scholars dance with the agility of young men. Torches are juggled and the throng sings and dances to the joyous tunes of the Levite orchestra and to the melody of their choir. The celebration continues throughout the night. No one sleeps.

All during the ceremony, two *Cohanim* stand at the bottom step of the Temple Courtyard. They hold trumpets in their hands; but they do not play them. At daybreak, the two bring their trumpets to their lips and blast the signaling sounds of the shofar. The crowd is hushed. The *Cohanim* start to ascend the fifteen steps towards the Temple Courtyard. On the tenth step, they stop. Again, the trumpets are blown. The trumpets continue to sound as the *Cohanim* mount the five remaining steps. At the top of the steps, under the great eastern gateway of the Temple Courtyard, the two *Cohanim* turn to face the crowd and call out, "Our eyes are to the Lord."

The morning Temple service begins. An entourage of *Cohanim* go down to the River Shiloach to draw water in a large golden vessel. When they return, trumpets are sounded again and the water is brought to the top of the Altar. The water is ceremoniously poured into a special basin on top of the Altar. At the same time, a vessel of wine is

poured into another basin. The prophet Isaiah had said, "And you shall draw water with joy,"⁴ and the people fulfill his word with great fervor.⁵

Scene IV

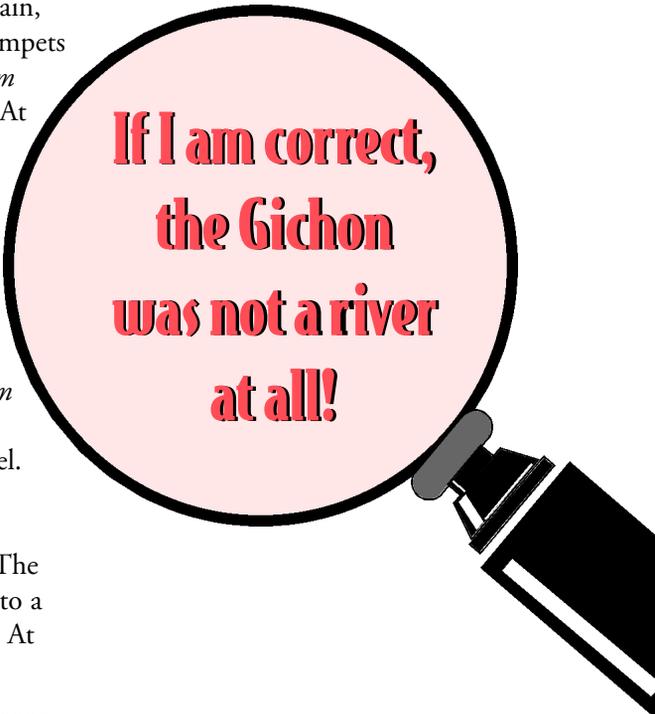
WATERS OF BLESSING, WATERS OF JOY — VANISHED!

Place: Your Home

Time: Today

You have just read of the coronation of young King Solomon by the River Gichon. You witnessed the breathless adventure of the digging of the water tunnel under ancient Jerusalem. In your mind's eye, you saw the Temple celebration above the River Shiloach. You make a mental note to visit these rivers on your next trip to Jerusalem. It does strike you as odd that you do not seem to recall any rivers around Jerusalem.

My friend, your recall is quite accurate. There are no rivers flowing near the holy city. What happened to the tranquil Shiloach and the rushing Gichon? How can rivers simply disappear without a trace? And what about the water tunnel? Who built it and when was it built? Is it still there? We shall tackle the last question first.



If I am correct,
the Gichon
was not a river
at all!

The water tunnel is still there. (See plate #1.) The entrance is several hundred yards south of the Temple Mount. More adventurous readers can actually traverse the 1,748-foot long tunnel, if they are prepared to get wet and do not suffer from claustrophobia. Oh



Plate #1

yes, be sure to bring a flashlight; it's quite dark in there. The entrance is located in the eastern valley below, called Siloam. The Arabic name Siloam is derived from the original

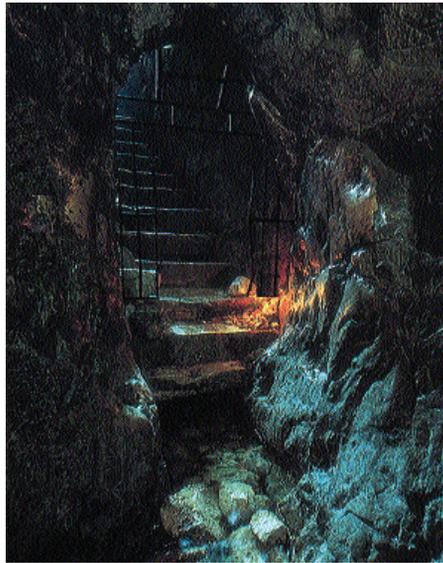


Plate #2

name of Jerusalem — Shalem, or Salem.⁶ Inside a stone-block building there is a flight of stone steps leading down into the northern end of the tunnel. The stream begins its flow from a crevice beneath the bottom step. (Plate #2.) It meanders through the mountain, exiting at the southern end into a small pool. (Plate #3.) Don't bother looking for the engraving carved by the stonecutter on his way out. It was removed in the latter part of the nineteenth century and carted off to Istanbul where it remains today, secreted in the basement of the Istanbul Archaeological Museum. (Plate #4.)

Historians have always attributed the digging of the tunnel to the righteous king of Israel, Hezekiah. When Hezekiah heard that the Assyrian emperor, Sennacherib, planned to lay siege to Jerusalem, the king ordered that all the springs outside the city were to be blocked up to deprive the enemy of a water supply. In addition, he “blocked the upper watercourse of Gichon, and brought it straight down to the western side of the City of David.”⁷ The plan was to bring the flow of the Gichon River inside the city walls by diverting its course by means of a subterranean water channel. The modern day name of the water tunnel is Hezekiah's Tunnel. Historians also decided to end the riddle of the missing rivers. They declared that the beginning of the

stream, at the northern end where the water flows from beneath the steps to be the Gichon River and the pool at the southern end to be the river Shiloach. (Plate #5.) This has become widely accepted as fact and is part of most tour guides' *spiel*. There are several things wrong with every one of these assumptions. Let's examine them, point by point:

1. The Biblical text quoted earlier states that Hezekiah “blocked the upper watercourse of Gichon, and brought it straight down to the western side of the City of David.” In other words, the Biblical Gichon was located along the western side of the city. The modern so-called Gichon is located at the eastern-most point of the ancient city. This fact alone should have convinced the historians that they were wrong. If we are to go with their assumptions, however, more obvious questions arise:

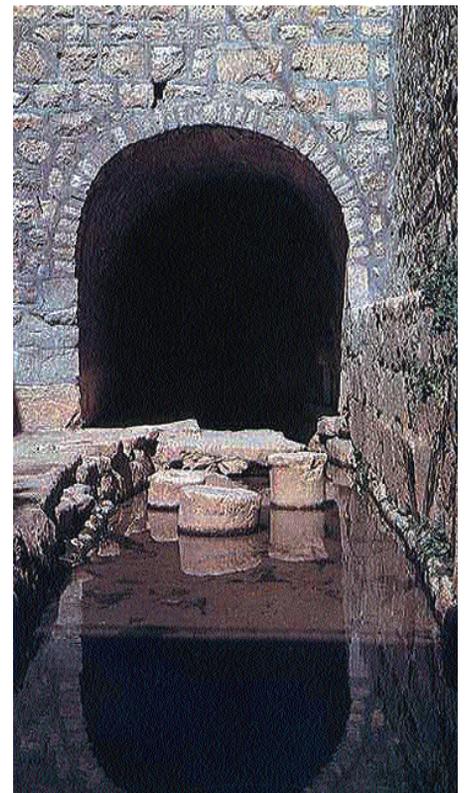


Plate #3

2. Why would two ends of a small stream, less than 1750 feet apart, have two different names?
3. Why would the *Cohanim* go all the way down to the Shiloach to draw water when the so-called Gichon was 1750 feet closer?

4. The purpose of the tunnel was to bring the river's water closer to the city and place it within the walls of the city. The fact is that in recent years the ancient city walls have been unearthed. It seems that the Gichon,

It was open and unprotected. We must conclude that the tunnel did not conduct the stream into the city, but rather it conducted the stream to the outskirts of the city.

The first century CE historian, Josephus

upper and lower watercourse?

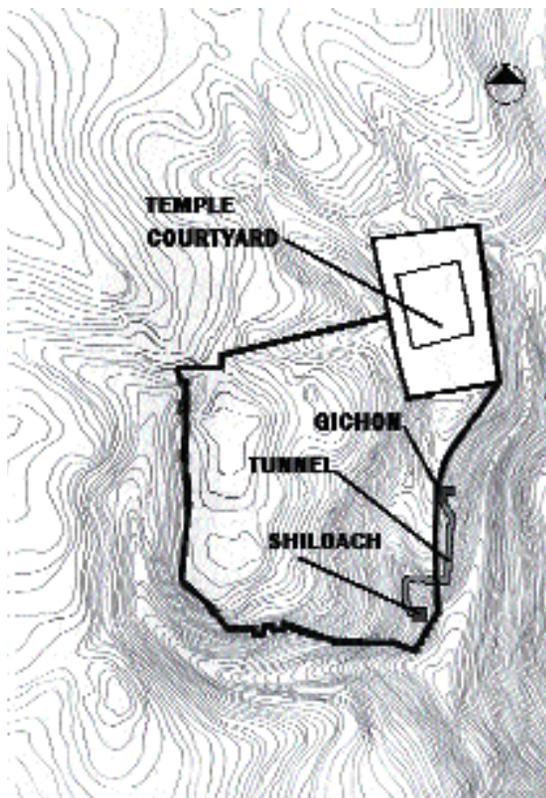
I would like to pose one more question, which may contain the key to solving the problem of the missing rivers. Josephus makes mention of a large pool outside the western wall of the ancient city. He calls it the Serpent's Pool.¹⁰ Where was that pool and how did it get its name?

Today, there are two extremely large, ancient water-pools outside the Old City of Jerusalem. One is called, by the Arabs, the Sultan's Pool. It is located west of the Old City, at the base of Mt. Zion in the Hinnom Valley. (Plate #6.) It resembles a valley with a dam stretched across the lower end. It is within a stone's throw of the Old City wall, which looms high above the pool.

The other pool is called, by the Arabs,



Plate # 4



Flavius, also attests to the fact that the Shiloach was *outside* the city.⁸ Josephus writes, “(the city wall) went (from the west) southward, bending above the Fountain Shiloach, where it also bends again towards the east at Solomon’s pool.” The phrase “above the Fountain Shiloach” means that the city wall was on higher ground than the Shiloach. The city of Jerusalem was built on top of the mountain; its protective city walls were below. If the wall was above Shiloach, but below the city, then Shiloach was located *outside* the city wall. 5. The modern day Shiloach is not a stream, but a pool. The pool does not flow. The prophet, Isaiah said “the waters of Shiloach, which flow gently.”⁹ 6. Josephus does not refer to the area of the modern Gichon spring by that name. Instead, he calls it

Plate # 5- Map according to old misconceptions

the river that was supposedly *outside* the city wall, was in fact *inside* the city wall. Not only was it inside the city wall, but it was protected by a massive guard tower. The Shiloach, which was assumed to have been inside the city wall, was in fact *outside* the city wall.

Solomon's Pools.

7. The Biblical text refers to the “upper watercourse of the Gichon.” That certainly implies there was a lower watercourse. According to the Gichon location of modern historians, what would be the explanation of an



Plate # 6

the Mamila Pool. It resembles an oversized Olympic swimming pool. It too is located west of the Old City, behind the Jerusalem Plaza Hotel, in Independence Park. (Plate #7.) These pools date back to very ancient times and were supplied by an aqueduct system that conveyed water from the south, possibly Bethlehem, to Jerusalem. The aqueduct forked into two branches in the vicinity of modern day Talpiot. One branch led to the Mamila Pool; the other led to the Sultan's Pool. The aqueduct that led to the Mamila Pool was on considerably higher ground than the branch that led to the Sultan's Pool. This is



Plate # 7

obvious to anyone familiar with the location of these two pools. Remains of the aqueduct system can still be seen in Talpiot, above the Sultan's Pool, and around the Mamila Pool.

Have you ever seen a photograph of an aqueduct taken from afar? It resembles a rectilinear serpent of stone and

brick, frozen in time, as it snakes its way across the landscape. (Plate #8.) The Josephus "Serpent" may very well have been an aqueduct. The Serpent's Pool may have referred to the Mamila pool where the serpentine aqueduct emptied its waters. A verse in Leviticus¹¹ describes a reptilian serpent as "*holech*

al gachon; it goes on his belly." The connection between the Biblical word used to describe the serpent, "*gachon*," and the river Gichon¹² is fairly obvious. If I am correct, the Gichon was not a river at all. It was a stone conduit, or aqueduct! In fact, nowhere does the Biblical literature refer to the River Gichon, or the Gichon River. It is always simply called Gichon, the Hebrew equivalent of aqueduct.

The "Upper Gichon" would refer to the upper branch of the aqueduct that led to the Mamila/Serpent's Pool. The "Lower Gichon" would be the lower branch of the aqueduct that led to the Sultan's Pool. (Plate #9) (After formulating this theory, I was in the research library of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem and found several maps of Jerusalem printed in the early nineteenth century. Those maps refer to the Mamila Pool as the Upper Gichon and the

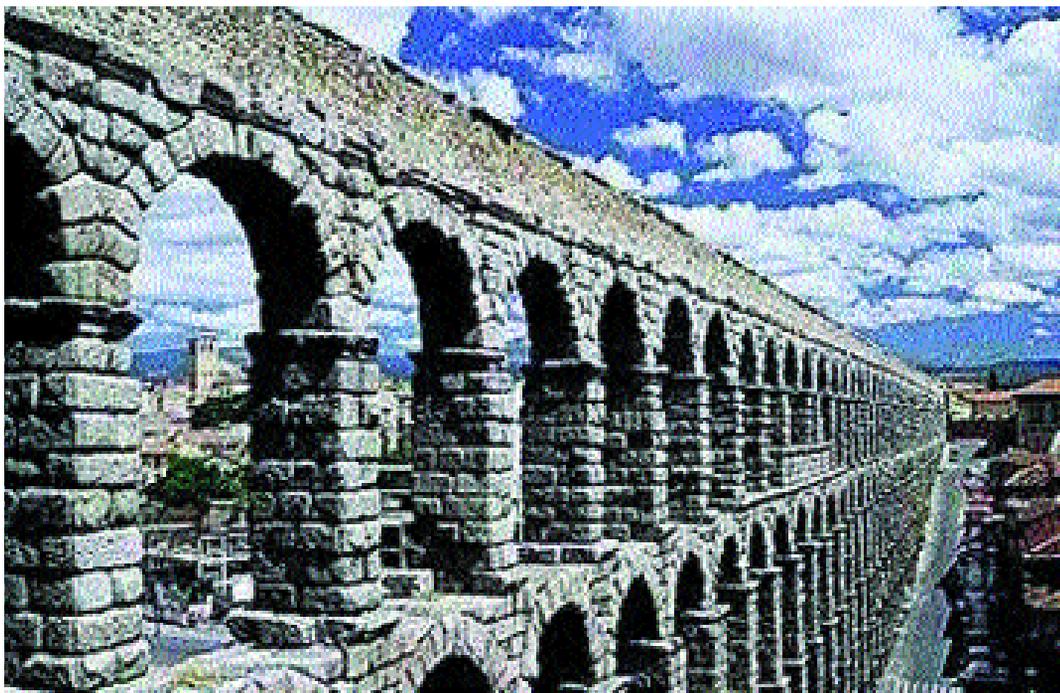


Plate # 8

Sultan's Pool as the Lower Gichon. One old map also refers to the hill to the west of the Sultan's Pool as Mount Gichon. "*Baruch she'kivanti.*")

So it would appear that King Hezekiah blocked the Upper Gichon so that the Mamila/Serpent's Pool would run dry. That pool was far from the city. It could have afforded the enemy precious water at a safe distance from the Israelite archers and stone-throwers who stood upon the city walls. His strategy, then, was to channel all the water into the Sultan's Pool. Though it, too, was outside the city limits, it was well within an arrow's

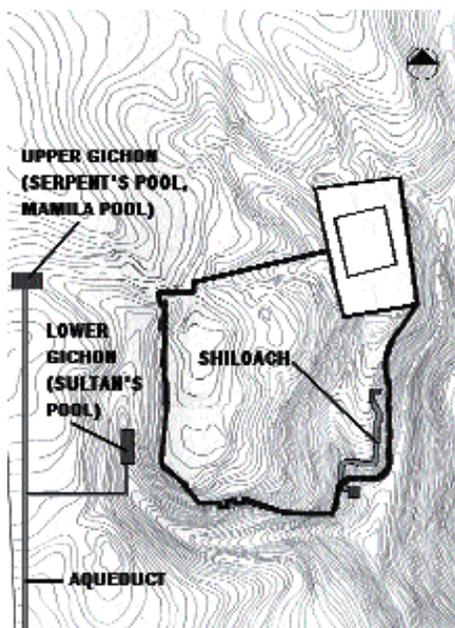


Plate # 9- Map according to new theory

shot from the top of the city wall. The Israelite archers and sling throwers easily could have defended that pool.

Now that we have "found" the Gichon, we can return to "Hezekiah's Water Tunnel." It is now safe to call both ends of the water tunnel Shiloach. It is interesting to note that we also do not find in Biblical or rabbinical literature the words "Shiloach River." It is always called Shiloach or The Shiloach. Perhaps Shiloach is a Hebrew term that means a water tunnel or channel.

The question still remains as to who built the water tunnel, Shiloach? Was it in fact Hezekiah? My guess is that it well may have been built in Hezekiah's time. The Shiloach was in existence in his time. We know this is true because

<h2 style="color: red;">Puzzling Points</h2>	
Archaeologists Assume:	The Author States:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Gichon was an underground spring that flowed along the eastern boundary of the ancient city. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Gichon was an aqueduct system built outside the western boundary of the ancient city.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The names Upper Gichon and the Lower Gichon have no comprehensible explanation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Upper Gichon is identified with the present day Mamila Pool and the Lower Gichon is identified with the present day Sultan's Pool.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The tunnel was built at the behest of King Hezekiah. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Perhaps it was built during Hezekiah's reign. (The inscription carved by the stonecutter does not mention the king at all.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The water tunnel was built by Hezekiah to bring the spring inside the city walls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The tunnel conducts the spring from inside the ancient city to the outside of the city.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Shiloach was a pool near the southeastern corner of the ancient city. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Shiloach was a water tunnel that ran along the eastern boundary of the ancient city.

his contemporary, the prophet Isaiah, refers to "the waters of Shiloach that flow gently." But why would Hezekiah's water tunnel be built — to conduct the underground stream to the *outside* of the city? Ah, that is part of the fascination of Jerusalem; as soon as one mystery is solved, another appears.¹³ **JA**

Notes

1. Based on I Kings, chapter 1.
2. *Horiyot* 12a, *K'ritot* 5b.
3. Based on the inscription found in the tunnel.
4. Isaiah 12:3.
5. Based on *Sukkah* 48a, 48b, 51a, 51b, 53a.
6. Genesis 14:18, Rashi.
7. II Chron. 32:30.

8. *Wars*, Book V, Chap. IV, paragraph 2.

9. Isaiah 8:6.

10. *Wars*, Book V, Chap. III, paragraph 2

11. Leviticus 11:42.

12. Compare with Rashi, Genesis 2:13.

13. It is interesting to note that there is another large pool, located inside the Old City, called Hezekiah's Pool. It is close to the Citadel and supplied the fortress with water. It received its water by means of an aqueduct that ran from the Mamila Pool to Hezekiah's Pool. Josephus calls the pool Amigdolon, from the Hebrew word *migdol*, meaning tower or fortress. The aqueduct was used as an escape route during the War of Independence in 1948.