

Jesus-era Siloam pool found in Jerusalem: Evidence of ancient, rock-hewn water systems

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In separate excavations in and near Jerusalem, archaeologists have found evidence of ancient, rock-hewn water systems, including a large, stepped basin that one group of scholars is calling the Pool of Siloam—a place-name that occurs in the Gospel of John, where Jesus tells a blind man whom he healed to wash there.

What may be the biblical Pool of Siloam was first found in the Old City of Jerusalem by workers repairing a sewage pipe. The newly discovered pool is less than 200 yards from another pool called Siloam which was built in the fifth century.

Archaeologist Ronny Reich of the University of Haifa, who was called in to examine the uncovered stone steps last fall by the Israel Antiquities Authority, seemed sure that it was a pool that was probably built in the first century B.C. and was destroyed about A.D. 70.

Though some news reports told of this discovery earlier, editor Hershel Shanks of *Biblical Archaeology Review* announced August 8 that his magazine has provided more analysis and details. New Testament scholar James H. Charlesworth of Princeton Theological Seminary accompanied Shanks at the Washington news conference.

From excavations made so far, the pool has been estimated to be 225 feet long. “This may be the most significant and largest mikvah [ritual bath] ever found,” Charlesworth said. He also noted that the heavily theological Gospel of John is not known as a source for historical references. The pool was fed water by the nearby Gihon Spring, which has been under excavation for decades.

In Jerusalem, other archaeologists announced August 9 that they have evidence of a “monumental rock-hewn water system” near Jerusalem dating back to the eighth

century B.C. The discovery was made during an eight-week dig at a cave close to Jerusalem, in Ein Kerem, which some regard as the birthplace of John the Baptist.

Last summer, Shimon Gibson, the chief archaeologist at the dig, announced that he had found a cave that may have been used by John the Baptist to anoint his followers.

Gibson and archaeologist James Tabor from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte suggested that the latest excavations have revealed the cave to be part of “a much larger Iron Age water system, rock-cut in places to a depth of 65 feet.”

The archaeologists said the cave, which dates back to the time of King Hezekiah (according to pottery shards from that period), contains a vertical shaft, an open horizontal corridor, a flight of stone steps above a tunnel and three plastered pools, all of which were on the slope above an underground reservoir.

Although elaborate water systems “have been found elsewhere,” Gibson said, until now they were discovered in Israel only within such cities as Beit Shemesh and Gibeon.