JERUSALEM, in the Times of King Hizqiyahu

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The city of Yerushalayim went through very difficult times. But we Jews always saw God’s direct intervention in protecting the city and its Bet haMiqdash, from the time Jerusalem was built until our own days, when Yerushalayim was miraculously recovered by the Israeli Army in the Six Days War in 1967.
THE FIRST FOUR CENTURIES
The Monarchs descendants of King David reigned in Yerushalayim for more than four centuries (ca. 1020 – 586 Before the Common Era). During all that period of time, the Bet haMiqdash was functioning. Three times a year, in Pesah, Shabu’ot and Sukkot, the Jewish people ascended to Yerushalayim. People settled in the Holy city for several days: a week in Pesah, a day in Shabu’ot and eight days in Sukkot. This is a very important element—and to the best of my knowledge, a unique phenomena among the capitals of the world— that gives Yerushalayim the character of the capital city of the people of Israel.
The Jewish people, during that time, suffered several crises. The most tragic event was undoubtedly the division of the nation into two kingdoms (ca. 930 BCE), the Kingdom of Israel, with ten tribes, and the Kingdom of Yehuda, with the tribes of Yehuda, Binyamin and the members of the tribe of Levi (the Kohanim and the Levites). Tragedies did not end there. Around 722 BCE the Assyrian Empire defeated and exiled the kingdom of Israel. Thousands of fugitives from the Ten Tribes took refuge in the kingdom of Yehuda. From that moment the people of Israel was normally called “the Jewish people” (members of the tribe or Kingdom of Yehuda= Judea).
EXTENDING AND PROTECTING YERUSHALAYIM
In the times of King Hizqiyahu (Hezekiah 729-686 BCE) the population of the city grew, due to the arrival of refugees from the 10 tribes. The king extended the city of Yerushalayim to the West and to the South, the area that today occupies the old city and especially the Jewish quarter. Around 701 BCE, Yerushalayim suffered one of his greatest crises, and experienced one of the greatest miracles.
Today I will begin to tell this story.
The Assyrian Emperor Sanherib, who had already destroyed the kingdom of Israel; defeated Babylon, fought Egypt and was destroying all the civilizations around, was preparing to do the same with the kingdom of Yehuda, what was left of the Jewish people. Sanherib sent his generals to besiege the city of Yerushalayim, with orders that if King Hizqiyahu does not surrender, the city would be destroyed.
Hizqiyahu did what he could. In the first place, he built very wide retaining walls, which can still be seen in the center of the Jewish quarter, next to the post office (the construction of these walls is narrated in Dibre haYamim 2, 32: 5). Hizqiyahu also built a famous tunnel that exists to this day. This tunnel connects the Temple Mount and the old city with the City of David, now called Silwan. “It was Hezekiah who blocked the upper outlet of the Gihon spring and channeled the water down to the west side of the City of David. He succeeded in everything he undertook.” Dibre haYamim 2, 32:30.
HIZQIYAHU’S TUNNEL
This tunnel, longer than 500 meters, or 1700 ft, was excavated to provide water to the city that was to be besieged. The water originally came from the Guihón, an underground spring on the outskirts of Yerushalayim, which has water all year round. The tunnel is a masterpiece of engineering. They had to drill the mountain stone, and since there was not much time, two teams had to work simultaneously, one on each side of the mountain. To this day, scholars are amazed at the technique used to synchronize the excavation and find the other team in the middle of the mountain. The book of Melakhim tells us that when the two groups were about 30 meters from each other, they heard the blows and thus joined in the center. There is an inscription, today in the Archeology Museum of Istanbul, Turkey, which celebrates this meeting. The passage reads:… the tunnel … and this is the story 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 counterpart, (for) there was zada in the rock, on the right … and on the day of the tunnel (being finished) the stonecutters struck each man towards his counterpart, ax against ax and flowed water from the source to the pool for 1,200 cubits. and (100?) cubits was the height over the head of the stonecutters .
To be continued…
The tunnel can be visited in the City of David.
See here


gaining access to the cities water source.