

Pool of Bethesda



Etymology

Bethesda - From Hebrew: Beth (house) and Hesda (kindness, charity, excellent, excel). The name may have been based on the quality of the waters in these pools, which their top-class quality granted favors to those who bathed in it. Perhaps, the quality attributed to these waters came from their use in the temple.

Description

Located just inside the Lion's Gate in Jerusalem are the remains of a pool with five porches, the Pool of Bethesda. Bethesda means house of mercy. Actually, there were two pools during the time of Christ separated by a middle walkway thus making five porches; and it was here that an angel came at a certain season to stir the waters. The first person to enter was then healed of whatever disease he had. There is no evidence for when this miraculous event began or when it ended, but it probably ended shortly after Christ's time.

The pool is located directly adjacent to the Temple Mount, and during the time of Christ, there was a substantial sheep market here, aided greatly by the sacrificial requirements surrounding the Temple system. Oftentimes, the sheep would be washed in this pool before being offered as a sacrifice in the Temple, a picture of Christ's atoning sacrifice made on our behalf and the spotless perfection of our Lord and Savior. During the time of Christ, it is believed that this pool was located outside of the city gate in the Kidron Valley. This location fits the Bible narrative.

Water Systems in the First Temple Period

The Bethesda water reservoirs supplied water to the temple mount. The first pool was constructed during the first temple, based on a dam that collected rain water flowing in the valley and stored it in a natural lake. Then the waters were directed from the lake to the temple in an open channel.

There are two references in the old testament to the "upper pool", which may have been the name of the pool.



Scripture

Bible References in Context

- The place where Jesus healed the sick man on the sabbath (John 5:1-9)
- Ahab inspected the water supply before war (Isaiah 7:3)

John 5:1-9

This text tells about how Jesus cured a sick man in the pools of Bethesda, which is a pool near the sheep market. The text is followed by a debate of whether healing is allowed during the Sabbath, which did not conform to the religious Jewish practices at that time.

"After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.

And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath".

Isaiah 7:3

This text refers to the "upper pool", perhaps the name of the Bethesda pools. In this text, King Ahaz prepared for war, and inspected the water supply in view of a possible siege.

"Then said the LORD unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou, and Shear-jashub thy son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field;"

II Kings 18:17

This text also refers to the "upper pool".

"And the king of Assyria sent Tartan and Rabsharis and Rabshakeh from Lachish to king Hezekiah with a great host against Jerusalem. And they went up and came to Jerusalem. And when they were come up, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is in the highway of the fuller's field."

Diagram of Bethesda

