

Fascinating Facts 11.20.2020

Large cities are generally located near a water source usually a river (New York - Hudson River), or a lake (Chicago - Lake Michigan), or natural springs (Atlanta - Sandy, Powder, Lithia). Without fresh water a city can't grow, hence Lake Lanier. Large cities are generally not located on mountaintops because that's not where the water is. A notable exception is Jerusalem. Hashem designated this mountaintop venue as the capital of Israel. That presents a problem. Where does Jerusalem find water? The answer is rainwater.

Rainwater seeps into the mountain and shows up in springs at the base of the mountain. In Jerusalem, the rainwater shows up in Gichon Spring located just outside the city. King David built a series of aqueducts and cisterns to transport the Gichon spring water inside the city. The problem was that access to the Gichon could be cut off by besieging enemies. The Shiloach, or Silwan pool, can be found on the southern slope of the City of David (on the southern side of the Temple Mount). Its job was to store the waters of the Gichon spring inside the city. Reservoirs are designed to store up spring water as well as to retain rainwater. Hezekiah's Pool, in what today is the Christian Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, is believed to be the reservoir referenced in Scriptures (Kings II 18:17). The Mamilla Pool situated 650 meters outside of the Jaffa Gate (where today the Mamilla Mall is found) was built by Herod the Great and was connected to Hezekiah's Pool via aqueducts. Birket Yisrael, was a public cistern on the northeast corner of the Temple mount, built by the Romans.

Two thousand years later nothing has changed. On November 18, 1958/6 Kislev 5719 a two-and-a-half-year project was completed with the opening of a new water reservoir for Jerusalem at Bayit Vegan a southwestern suburb of Jerusalem. The project began in 1955 as both a means to prevent a repeat of the water shortage caused during the siege of the city during the 1948 Independence War as well as to promote urban development in and around Jerusalem. The project, which cost between 1.5 and 2 million Israeli Lira to complete was financed by capital raised through the selling of Israel Bonds.

Both the lack of and high cost of water in the city had prevented industry from developing in the capitol. Prior to the opening of the new reservoir, Jerusalem had the highest water rates in Israel. Attracting industry was seen as a vital step in developing the city's economy as well as providing employment for its rapidly expanding population. At the end of the 1948 Independence War Jerusalem's population was about 84,000. By 1958, the city's population had grown to over 150,000. Today it is over 750,000 ken yirbu so may it continue to increase.