

Hezekiah's Broad Wall

by Leon Mauldin

Isaiah prophesied during the reign of good King Hezekiah of Judah (r. 715-686 BC). Isaiah states, *"Then you counted the houses of Jerusalem, and you tore down houses to fortify the wall"* (22:10). This was done in response to the very real threat of Sennacherib of Assyria (r. 705-681 BC)., as he advanced toward Jerusalem. More details are given in 2 Chronicles:

"Now when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and that he intended to make war on Jerusalem, he decided with his officers and his warriors to cut off the supply of water from the springs which were outside the city, and they helped him. So many people assembled and stopped up all the springs and the stream which flowed through the region, saying, 'Why should the kings of Assyria come and find abundant water?' And he took courage and rebuilt all the wall that had been broken down and erected towers on it, and built another outside wall and strengthened the Millo in the city of David, and made weapons and shields in great number" (2 Chron. 32:2-5, NASB).

This wall was excavated by Nahman Avigad in 1969. Biblical Archaeological Review has the following info:

This massive wall, which once probably stood 27 feet high, provides the key to dating Jerusalem's spread from the eastern to the western hill.

Before unearthing a 130-foot section of the wall, Avigad had already discovered remains of houses in the same area containing pottery and other artifacts datable to the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. The wall itself stood partly on bedrock and partly on recently built houses. Avigad reasoned that only a king could have ordered the building of so major a structure, and the fact that new housing had to be destroyed in the process indicates that the wall was erected during a crisis. Two passages in the Bible helped Avigad pinpoint the date and purpose of the wall: King Hezekiah, in 701 B.C.E., *"saw that [the Assyrian ruler] Sennacherib had come, intent on making war against Jerusalem.... He [Hezekiah] acted with vigor, rebuilding the whole breached wall, raising towers on it and building another wall outside it"* recounts 2 Chronicles 32:2-5 and Isaiah 22:10 states that Hezekiah *"pulled houses down to fortify the wall."* Hezekiah, thanks in part to this wall, successfully repulsed Sennacherib's attack.

From the angle in the wall and from data revealed by other excavations, Avigad argued that the wall enclosed more of the western hill of Jerusalem than previously believed; archaeologist Magen Broshi estimated that 25,000 people had lived within the wall's boundaries in the eighth century B.C.E.

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A section of Hezekiah's Wall in Jerusalem. Photo by Leon Mauldin.