



I am Known by Many Names

In honor of Yom Yerushalayim, let's look at the origins of some of the city's names.

Yerushalayim

It is generally understood that the name is composed of two parts – *Yeru* and *Shalem*. The Midrash¹ says that *Yeru* comes from *yirah* – fear: “G-d said ‘If I call it *Yireh*, as Avraham called it, then Shem, who was a righteous man, will become angry; and if I call it *Shalem*, Avraham, who was a righteous man, will be angry. Instead, I call it Yerushalayim [Jerusalem], as they called it together: *Yireh Shalem*.”

However, linguists say that *yeru* means “foundation.” While *yarah* generally means “to cast, throw,” there are verses where it means “to establish,” such as “the pillar which I have set up”² and “who set its cornerstone?”³

Shalem

The name Yerushalayim is not found in the Torah. It first appears in Yehoshua 10:1, “When King Adoni-Tzedek of Yerushalayim heard...” However, as we saw in the Midrash above, many believe that the city Shalem, mentioned in Bereishit 14:18, was the original name of the city. There are a number of reasons for this theory. One is a similarity of the name Adoni-Tzedek in Yehoshua, with the king of Shalem, Malki-Tzedek, in Bereishit. Another is a parallel found in Tehillim 76:3 – “Shalem became His abode; Zion, His den.” In that verse, both Shalem and Zion appear to refer to Yerushalayim.

Shalem (and Yerushalayim) was a Jebusite city, and for the Canaanite residents the name probably had pagan connotations. But when it became

the capital of Israel, the name became associated with the word *shalom* – “peace.” Yerushalayim is associated with peace in many Biblical verses,⁴ and so the linguist Ernest Klein thinks the name Yerushalayim should be translated literally as “foundation of peace.” *Shalom*, in turn, derives from *shalem*, meaning “complete.” The verb *שָׁלַם* can mean “to complete,” “to make peace,” and “to make compensation” – i.e. “to pay.”

Tzion

As we saw in Tehillim 76:3, *Tzion* is another name for Yerushalayim. It first appears in Shmuel II 5:7, “But David captured the stronghold of *Tzion*; it is now the City of David.” In this verse, it refers specifically to the fortress of the city. It has that limited sense in three other verses. However, in the other 150 occurrences in the Bible, it refers to either all of Jerusalem or the entire Land of Israel.

But *Tzion* was always more poetic or symbolic than a specific place name. It could be considered more of a concept than a location. The linguist Ruvik Rosenthal wrote that *Tzion* “is a dream that desires to become reality.” Therefore it is not surprising that it inspired the name of the movement of a return to the Land of Israel – “Zionism.”

The etymology of *Tzion* is unclear. Some say it is related to the word *tziyun* – “monument, landmark,” which is related to the word *metzuyan* – “distinguished, excellent.” Others say it derives from the root *צִיָּה* (or *הִצָּץ*) meaning “dry, drought,” and so the meaning would be “bare hill.” This meaning can be understood by Jerusalem’s bordering the Judean Desert. A third theory is that *Tzion* comes from the root *צָנָה* – “to preserve.” A *tzinah* is a “large shield”

or “protective wall,” and this could explain why it came to be the name of a fortress.

City of David

We saw that *Tzion* was renamed the City of David – *Ir David*. Where does the name David come from? The name is usually translated as “beloved.” There are indeed many words in Hebrew with a related root that indicate love. *Dod* means lover (particularly in Shir HaShirim), *yadid* means “friend” or “beloved” and the mandrake flowers known as *dudaim*⁵ were believed to stimulate love. *Dod* also means “uncle,” perhaps because it was common for uncles to marry nieces in ancient times.

Some scholars have noted that *yadid* meaning “beloved, darling,” usually applies to the youngest child. We see this with Binyamin⁶ and Shlomo.⁷ David was also the youngest child in his family, and perhaps his name also reflected his status as the youngest, and beloved, child. And these usages all reflect someone chosen for leadership (the first king of Israel was Shaul, from Binyamin, and the next kings were David and Shlomo). This understanding of the origin of David makes it an appropriate name for Yerushalayim as well – our beloved and chosen city!

1 Bereishit Rabbah 56:10.

2 Bereishit 31:51.

3 Iyov 38:6.

4 Tehillim 122:6, Yeshayahu 52:7, Yirmiyahu 33:6 and more.

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