

# Librarian's Lobby

## By Daniel D. Stuhlman

### The Spelling of Yerushalayim

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Today the city of Jerusalem<sup>1</sup> (Yerushalayim ירושלים) is the capital of Israel and central to the prayers and yearnings of the Jewish people. A few days ago someone asked me why the *Tanakh* (Bible) spells the word without the letter *yod* (i.e. ירושלם) yet has the vocalization as if the *yod* was present. The quick answer is that in the *Tanakh* as other ancient Hebrew writing was done without vowels. There are places when words are written in a full form called, *Kitiv mal'e* and other places when words are written in a shorter form, *Kitiv haser*. The orthography (spelling or writing of words) of the *Tanakh* used the shorter form. The answer is not that easy.

Language is a representation for thoughts. Orthography is a representation of how words are pronounced. Pronunciation, the oral representation of language, changes at a faster rate than written words. For example in English we can read and understand works written several hundred years old (for example the plays of Shakespeare), but the sound of the words will be hard to understand. Before the days of mass communications language was much more localized. When the Israelites entered the Land of Israel they brought a version of Hebrew from Egypt and Mesopotamia. Abraham brought his linguistic tradition to Canaan. When the land of Canaan was conquered many Canaanite words were assimilated into Hebrew. For example *ba'al*, *molakh*, and *shalem* (בעל, מלך, שלם) were Canaanite deities whose names morphed into Hebrew words with entirely new meanings but some how connected to the root meanings.

There are three elements to Hebrew orthography of the *Tanakh*, the consonantal text,<sup>2</sup> the vowel points or vocalization, and the cantillation marks. These elements combine to give us meaning. Sometimes a change in one aspect would give a different meaning. For example the cantillation marks are placed on the accented syllables and they delineate expressions in a way commas and parenthesis delimit English. A change or alternative cantillation may affect the meaning of a sentence. Only the consonantal text is recorded from ancient times. The cantillation was passed down as an oral tradition. The vowels and cantillation marks were recorded by the Masorites of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. Vowel marks were designed to aid in the pronunciation of the text. The marks added to the text to record Hebrew as they pronounced or heard it. There is no reason to expect their pronunciation was the same as when the Torah was given. However, there was a long tradition of vowel marks before the time of the Masorites. William Chomsky in *Hebrew, the eternal language* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1957)<sup>3</sup> has a full explanation on the role of vowels and the evolution of the vowel marks in Hebrew. He says that as long as people spoke Hebrew orally and were reasonably literate in sacred Hebrew texts there was no compelling reason to write vowel marks. As the people moved away from everyday speaking of Hebrew and were forced into the Diaspora, the need for vowel marks or vowel letters was increasingly needed.

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<sup>1</sup> For a fuller explanation as to why Jerusalem starts with a "J" see the *Librarian's Lobby* May 2004, "Why Start Jacob and Joseph With a "J"?" <http://home.earthlink.net/~ddstuhlman/crc71.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Each of these elements are graphemes i.e. smallest unit of written language that has meaning.

<sup>3</sup> Another explanation about the vocalization of Hebrew may be found in *Canon and text of the Old Testament* / by Frants Buhl. Translated by John Macpherson. (Edinburgh : T & T Clark, 1892.) Page 207-219.

One may question why the vowels developed as lines and dots instead of full letters as in Greek and other European languages. Some said that Moses was given the vowel-signs, which has no basis in any ancient text. We can not recover the exact way Hebrew was spoken in the time of Moses and therefore some of the nuances of poetry, word play, and pun are lost to us. The length of consonants varied and is difficult for us to reproduce. The vowel points are only approximations of speech. For example in the *segolate*<sup>4</sup> nouns, *melekh*, *degel*, and *pesel* (מֶלֶךְ, דֶּגֶל, פֶּסֶל), the vowel *segol* appears twice and has two sounds within the same word. The first syllable is accented and the length of the first vowel is a few milliseconds longer and the pitch is slightly higher. Sephardim do not differentiate *tzere* and *segol* in many words. The traditional Biblical text was considered sacred meaning nothing could be added or subtracted. Natronai II, Gaon in Sura 859-869, said that the pointing was not given contemporaneously with the Law on Sinai, but had its origin in later times.<sup>5</sup> When he was asked if vowel points could be added to a Torah scroll he emphatically wrote, no.

## Etymology of Yerushalayim ירושלים

When King David first conquered the city,<sup>6</sup> he did not name the city, Yerushalayim. David probably called the city, *'Ir David* (City of David) when he ruled (see II Shmuel 5:7) following a known practice among Assyrian kings to name conquered cities after themselves. There is no record of King Shlomo calling the city *'Ir Shlomo* even though "Shlomo" and "shalem" have the same root. The etymology of the word Yerushalayim is not clear. Let me explain some possibilities. Shalem (sometimes Romanized as Salem) was the name of a Canaanite god representing dawn and twinned with Shahar representing dawn. "Uru" is an earlier form of the Hebrew 'ir meaning city. Based on this etymology, *Yerushalayim* means: "City of Shalem." The literary evidence is found in Genesis 14:18 in the story of Abraham meeting Melchizedek, the king of a city called Shalem.<sup>7</sup> The two letter root shin-mem שֵׁם means "to put." Later it becomes the three letter root שֵׁלֵם meaning "to complete" or "to pay." The noun form meant something that is whole or complete, which is the concept of peace. Idiomatically it developed to the word for greeting both when coming and when going. English and other European languages translate שָׁלוֹם as peace (*pax* in Latin.) Using this concept *Yerushalayim* means *city of completeness or peace*. In *The Encyclopedia of El Amarna Research Tool, which is a tool to find references in the Tel Amarna letters*, (<http://www.specialtyinterests.net/eae.html#287>) Urusalim is the name for Yerushalayim. The ending of the word is the plural *yod-mem*.

The rabbis (see Rashi on Gen. 14:18 and Nedarim 32) said the city was first called Yireh, meaning inheritance, founded by Shem ben Noah. Hence the name meant "inheritance of Shem." This is a folk etymology.

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<sup>4</sup> Briefly these three letter nouns have double *segols*. There are other three letter nouns such as *sefer* סֵפֶר that have vowels that have morphed to other sounds.

<sup>5</sup> The responsim is quoted in *Mahzor Vitry ed. By Shimon Hurwitz p. 91, no. 120*. However, *Otzar Yisrael* (7:104) discusses doubts on the origin of this responsim.

<sup>6</sup> The term, "city" is applied loosely. The area David conquered was about 7.5-10 acres large. There is a city park that big in my neighborhood.

<sup>7</sup> Shalem is connected to Yerushalayim in Psalms 74:3 and Targum Onkelos has מַלְכָּה דִירוּשָׁלַיִם *malkha di-rushlaim*. This is reinforced with El-Amana Letters. These tablets of clay, found in Egypt, are records of correspondence between Jerusalem and Egypt.

The first use of the word *Yerushalayim* in *Tanakh* is Joshua 10:3. The orthography is without the –*ayim* in writing, but with its pronunciation according to the vocalization. This is the spelling in most of the places of the *Tanakh*.

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## Pronunciation of Yerushalayim ירושלים

When one reads the *Tanakh* today we subconsciously combine three traditions:

A) The consonantal text of Biblical Hebrew along with some letters that act as vowels. This text from about 850-550 BCE differs in script and orthography from when they were first written down. (The first Sifre Torah were written in the ancient Hebrew script. This is the same script as the Samaritans use in their Torah.) In the Dead Sea scrolls the Tetragrammaton (YHWH) is written in the ancient script while the rest of the sentence is in the square script.)

B) The vowels points, stress marks, and cantillation marks superimposed by the Masorites in about 850 CE. The Masorites used a system of marks for the Tiberian tradition. This was one of several vowel systems. The Masorites were trying to preserve older traditions, but they vocalized Hebrew as they heard it, not how Hebrew was spoken in Biblical times.

C) A modern pronunciation system usually based on Israeli Hebrew or European Ashkenazi traditions. Modern speakers modify the length, broadness, or pitch of the vowels according to their native language experience and tradition. The value of a long or short vowel in Modern Hebrew is not the same as in Biblical Hebrew.<sup>8</sup>

The Greek and Latin translations of the Bible preceded the Masoretic text. These translations reproduced the names of people and places as their ears heard them. In Greek the name is: Ἰερουσαλήμ (*Yerusalem*). During the Greek period it was also written: Ἰερουσόλημα. In the Latin translation *Hierusalem*, *Hiersolyma*, *Ierusalem*, or *Ierosolyma*<sup>9</sup> are used. In Ezra (4:8, 20, 24, and 51) the Aramaic form is: יְרוּשָׁלַיִם (*Yerushalayim*) The Syriac uses *Urishalem*. Even though some Ancient Hebrew coins<sup>10</sup> in the first century used the form without the yod-mem ending this may not mean anything about how the name was pronounced.

None of the proposed etymologies suggest any spelling other than shin-lamed-mem שֵׁלֵם as the final letters. Since none add the duple –*ayim* spelling or pronunciation, the question remains as to the source of the ending. The duple –*ayim* is used to mean “two” as compared to singular and plural forms. Examples are *yadayim* (יָדַיִם) and *raglayim* (רַגְלַיִם) meaning two hands and two feet. In Israel

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<sup>8</sup> For more information about the history of Hebrew visit David Steinberg's site: *History of the ancient and Modern Hebrew language* / by David Steinberg ([http://www.adath-shalom.ca/history\\_of\\_hebrew.htm](http://www.adath-shalom.ca/history_of_hebrew.htm)) version 14.0 Oct. 15, 2009. In particular look at the chapter, “Biblical Hebrew poetry and word play” / by David Steinberg ([http://www.houseofdauid.ca/anc\\_heb.htm](http://www.houseofdauid.ca/anc_heb.htm)). Steinberg is a retired Canadian civil servant and an independent scholar.

<sup>9</sup> The Latin translation of the Bible, called The Vulgate, was made by Jerome between the years of 390 and 405 CE. It is not clear how much he translated from the Hebrew text and how much was from the Greek translation.

<sup>10</sup> This claim is made in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York : Funk and Wagnalls, 1904) article, “Jerusalem” (vol. 7 page 119.) I examined many pictures of coins on the WWW, but many had words that I could not decipher. In *Jerusalem sacred city of mankind ...* / by Teddy Kollek and Moshe Pearlman (Jerusalem : Steimatzky's Agency, 1968) on page 134 are pictures of coins from the Bar Kokhba era. The coins use the ancient Hebrew script with the spelling without the yod of the –*ayim* ending. This month the Israel Antiquities Authority had a display of coins never before made public. I received an e-mail from Gabriela Bijovsky, IAA coin curator, stating that the coin mentioning the name of the city is from, 66-70 CE with the an inscription in Paleo-Hebrew ירושלים הקדשה Jerusalem the Holy. (with a yod). This indicates that by 66 CE they were using the –*ayim* pronunciation.

there is one city with a masculine plural ending, Maccabim.<sup>11</sup> Machanayim is a place name with a duple form from in Genesis 32:3. There are a few other places modern Israel modern and Biblical Israel with the *-ayim* ending.<sup>12</sup> Gittaim (גתים Nehemia 11:33) is a Biblical city whose name is associated with Gath. Givataim, founded in 1922, is a suburb of Tel Aviv. In 1942 it combined with four other towns and they choose the name Givataim (גבעתיים) meaning “Two hills.” While the names have the *-aiyim* ending, they do not shed light on the etymology of Yerushalayim.

The Tanakh has 360 occurrences with several prefixes of ירושלם and only five of ירושלים. In addition the Aramaic texts has another 26 occurrences written without the *-ayim* spelling or vocalization.<sup>13</sup> In the Dead Sea scrolls (DSS) we find the spelling ירושלים (with the *yod*) in the books of Isaiah when the Masoritic text (MT) has ירושלם (without the *yod*) Examples are Isaiah 1:1, 10:32, 40:2. In Isaiah 30:19 both the MT and the DSS are missing the *yod*. In Isaiah 52:1 the MT has no *yod*, one scroll has a *yod* and one is missing the *yod*.<sup>14</sup> There are no vowel points in the DSS. The scribes frequently added vowel letters such as *yod* and *vav* to aid in the reading.

Since are no other cities are named after Canaanite deities to compare to the etymology of Yerushalayim perhaps the *-ayim* form was initiated to differentiate *Yerushalayim* from the name Shalem? Perhaps the duple ending was a connection to the two hills that the city is built upon, Mount Zion and Mount Moriah? There is no exact date when this pronunciation occurred and no literary evidence to confirm it. The Greek translation of the Torah, according to *Mesechet Megilla* 9 indicates that the translation was done in about the third century BCE. The rest of the Greek translation was done sometime between the third and first century BCE. We do know that sometime in the 1000 year span of 200 BCE and 800 CE the name or at least the pronunciation was changed. We don't know if the name or the pronunciation morphed or was deliberately changed, however, there seems to be no rule of grammar or literary evidence to indicate how such a change could be made. There are no parallels in the name of city or person with the duple *-ayim* form. This leads me to believe that the change was deliberate, made at an indeterminable time, and without any linguistic precedent.

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<sup>11</sup> Maccabim, founded in 1985, is now part of Modim-Maccabim-Re'ut. The cities united in 2003. Rehovot has a feminine Hebrew plural form. Other cities have “ramot” as part of their names including: Ramot, Ramot Ha-Shavim, Ramot Gilead, and Ramot Menasheh. Ramatayim is a moshav. Rehoboth Beach, Delaware named after the Biblical city.

<sup>12</sup> In the U.S. there are lots of cities with “hills” or “springs” for example Beverly Hills and Agora Hills in California, but this has no connection with Biblical Hebrew.

<sup>13</sup> According to C.D. Ginsburg in *The Massorah* vol. 4 pages 526-7 (Jerusalem: Makor, 1971) and *Biblia Hebraica* there are no manuscripts that add the *yod* when the MT has none.

<sup>14</sup> This information is from an index prepared by Lidija Novakovi in the book *The Pesharim and Qumran history : chaos or consensus /* by James H. Charlesworth (Grand Rapids, Michigan : Eerdmans Publishing, 2002) The pesharim are commentaries on the *Tanakh* written by the Qumran community and are part of what we collectively call the Dead Sea scrolls. The index lists all the differences between MT and the Qumran texts.

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