

Why Does the Chumash Not Mention Jerusalem by Name?

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A. Jerusalem is only hinted at in the Torah

Surprisingly, nowhere in the Pentateuch is Jerusalem mentioned by its full name. We encounter “Jerusalem” (*Yerushalayim*) for the first time in *Yehoshua* 10:1, where mention is made of the king of this city, Adonizedek. Of course, there are innumerable mentions of Jerusalem throughout the rest of the *Neviim* and *Ketuvim*. However, while the Torah (i.e., the *Chumash*) does not mention Jerusalem explicitly, there are several hints to the city.

In *Sefer Bereishit*, Jerusalem is hinted at twice, both times in the story of Avraham. The first instance is in Chapter 14, where we meet Malkitzedek, King of Shalem – which is identified with Jerusalem^[1] – who comes out to greet Avraham upon his return from victorious battle against the Four Kings. The second hint is in Chapter 22, where Avraham is commanded to offer up Yitzchak as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah, which is also located in Jerusalem.^[2]

Throughout *Sefer Devarim*, from *Parashat Re’ei* onwards, the Torah speaks over and over (21 instances in all) of “the place that God will choose.” This expression, referring to Jerusalem^[3] without mentioning it explicitly, highlights the deliberate concealment of Jerusalem in the Torah.

In Moshe’s blessing to Binyamin (*Devarim* 33:12), the Torah hints that Binyamin’s portion is the dwelling place of the Divine Presence: “To Binyamin he said, The beloved of God will dwell in safety by Him; He shall cover him all the day and He shall rest between his shoulders.” Indeed, when the Land was divided into tribal inheritances, Jerusalem was part of Binyamin’s portion.

The fact that Jerusalem is hinted at several times in the Torah without ever being mentioned by its full name raises a problem: why is the place that is destined to become the capital city of the Kingdom of Israel, and the place where the Divine Presence dwells for all generations, not made

explicitly clear? This phenomenon cannot be coincidental, and we shall now attempt to understand the reasons for the Torah's veil of mystery in this regard.

B. Why is Jerusalem not mentioned in the Torah by its full name?

1. The Rambam (*Guide* III:45) writes, concerning Mount Moriah:

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The fact that the Torah does not make specific mention of it [Jerusalem], but rather hints at it and says, "...[the place] which God will choose" etc., appears to me to have three explanations:

- 1) so that the nations would not seize the place and wage power struggles over it, knowing that this place – out of the entire Land – represents the ultimate purpose of the Torah;
- 2) lest whoever possessed it at the time destroy it and devastate it to the limit of their power;
- 3) the strongest reason of all – that a situation would not arise in which every tribe would want it included in its inheritance, so as to be able to rule over it, and it would fall to [whichever tribe would emerge victorious] as a result of controversy and strife, as did the quest for the priesthood. For this reason we are commanded that the Temple not be built until after the coronation of a king, so that there is one single ruler and all strife falls away...

The first two reasons concern the nations of the world, and they essentially reflect the same idea: if the nations of the world would know the enormous value of this place, they would try to prevent Israel from gaining control over it – whether by waging war over it or by utterly destroying it.[4]

The third reason concerns *Am Yisrael*, and here the Rambam refers us to a *Beraita* in *Sanhedrin* (20b): "*Bnei Yisrael* were given three commandments upon entering the Land: to appoint a king, to destroy Amalek, and to build the Temple." Further on, the *Beraita* concludes that this order is binding. That is, the king must be appointed before Amalek is annihilated, and the war against Amalek must precede the building of the Temple. The Rambam rules accordingly (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 1:1-2). According to what he writes in the *Guide*, the reason a king must be appointed before the Temple is

built is so that there will be no controversy in this regard; also, since the place belongs to all of *Am Yisrael*, its conquest cannot be a tribal matter.

In other words, since it is the dwelling of the Divine Presence, Mount Moriah must be approached with a sense of unity. For this reason, the king – one of whose functions is to prevent strife and to create a united reign – must precede the building of the Temple. There is a fundamental connection between both Jerusalem and the Temple, on the one hand, and the unity of Israel, on the other. The unity of the entire nation of Israel – as the Rambam explains – is a prerequisite for reaching Jerusalem.

The fact that Jerusalem is a place that reflects the unity of all of Israel is a central and essential fact of its existence:

- *Chazal* teach that “Jerusalem was not distributed among the tribes”^[5] – in other words, this city belongs to all of Israel. This opinion is accepted as halakha,^[6] and therefore there is no private ownership in Jerusalem.

- David chooses this city, situated on the border between Binyamin and Yehuda, in an attempt to unite two disputing tribes, representing the children of Rachel and the children of Leah.

- Moreover, David’s choice of this city follows immediately after his coronation over all of Israel, and hence expresses his desire to unite all of Israel and to rule over all of them from this new capital city.

- On the verse, “Jerusalem built, like a city that is all joined together” (*Tehillim* 122:3), the *Yerushalmi* comments (*Chagiga* 79d), “It is a city that makes all of Israel *chaverim*.” The *chaverim* were especially scrupulous people who ate not only sacred items but even their regular meals in a state of ritual purity. However, when all Israel went to Jerusalem during the pilgrim festivals, there was no separation between the *chaverim* and the rest of the population, for all are considered to be pure. This halakha reflects the aspiration for all of Israel to be unified before God.

- David purchases the site of the Temple using the communal funding of all of Israel (six hundred *shekel*, fifty shekel from each tribe);^[7] the shifts and watches during which the Temple service was performed, include representatives of the entire nation; and the half-shekel that every Israelite

individual is required to donate every year for the funding of the Temple service – all of these involve all of Israel.

The above are just some examples of how Jerusalem and the Temple join all of Israel together. As noted, according to the Rambam, this unity is facilitated but the initial concealment of its location.

It is interesting that the Radak (II *Shmuel* 5:6) views kingship as a condition for something slightly different:

“And the king went, and his men”: In *Divrei Ha-yamim* (I 11:4) we read, “David went, and all of Israel” – because all of Israel were now “his men,” and since he ruled over all of Israel, he went to Jerusalem to capture the citadel of Zion (Jerusalem), for it was a tradition among them that Zion was the head of the Kingdom of Israel, and it would be captured only by one who was king over all of Israel. Until this time there had been no kingship in Israel, for the kingship of Shaul did not endure.

The Radak is addressing a different question: why Jerusalem had not been conquered from the time of the conquest of the Land, in Yehoshua’s time, until the time of David. His answer was that it was traditionally accepted that this place would be captured only by a king who would rule over all of Israel. While the Rambam emphasizes the connection between kingship and unity as a precondition for building a Temple on Mount Moriah, the Radak focuses on the kingship over all of Israel as a precondition for the conquest of the city.

What is common to both commentaries is the fact that Jerusalem and the Temple require unity because these places are themselves centers of kingship. Jerusalem is the capital of the kingship of Israel, while the Temple is the place of the kingship of God. This connection makes it possible to address the commentaries of the Rambam and the Radak jointly, even though each of them is talking about a different place.

It should be noted that the Rambam seems to suggest that *Bnei Yisrael* did not know the site of the future Temple, even though we may have understood from the verses that the Temple would be built on the site of the *Akeida* (the binding of Yitzchak). As Rabbeinu Bachya (*Devarim* 12:5) writes:

Therefore the text conceals this place and does not make it plain. Needless to say, the nations were not aware of it, for even Israel did not know it. Even though everyone knew the special status of Mount Moriah, they did not know that this was the place that God would choose.

2. *Sifri* on *Parashat Re'ei*

Concerning the verse, “But to the place that the Lord your God will choose from all your tribes, to put His Name there, you shall seek Him there at His dwelling, and you shall come there,” the *Sifri* comments (*Sifri Devarim, piska* 62):

“But to the place which the Lord your God will choose from all your tribes”: this is to be interpreted by a prophet. Is it possible that you will have to wait until the prophet tells you? [Surely not;] therefore the text teaches: “You shall seek Him at His dwelling, and you shall come there.” That is, seek it and find it, and afterwards a prophet will confirm it. This is what happened with David, as it is written: “Remember, God, in David’s favor all his afflictions, when he swore to God, making an oath to the Mighty One of Yaakov: ‘I shall not enter the sanctuary of my house, nor give sleep to my eyes... until I find a place for God; a resting place for the Mighty One of Yaakov’” (*Tehillim* 132:1-5).

The Midrash is trying to explain the significance of the unusual command to seek the place. The Torah does not contain many commandments requiring us to seek something out, but here – when it comes to the “place that God will choose” – we are commanded to seek God’s dwelling place. The Gemara (*Rosh Ha-shana* 30a) finds a similar demand in the verse in *Yirmiyahu* (30:17): “This is Zion; none seeks her’ – implying that it requires seeking.” Jerusalem and the Temple, defined as “the place that God will choose to make His Name dwell,” are a location unknown to *Bnei Yisrael*. The place exists, but *Bnei Yisrael* do not know where; they are obligated to seek out and search for the place, and find it.[8] The significance of this demand – which is fulfilled by King David, as the *Sifri* testifies on the basis of *Tehillim* 132 – is that the Holy One wishes to make His Presence rest in a place on

condition that *Bnei Yisrael* desire His Presence and closeness, and are prepared to invest effort and spiritual energy in seeking and finding it. The place itself expresses the greatest possible closeness between the Holy One and the nation of Israel. God tells us, as it were, “You want Me to be close to you? Seek out the place, look for it and find it.”

A similar approach arises from Rashi (*Bereishit* 12:2):

God did not at once reveal the [name of the] land to Avraham, in order to make it desirable in his eyes and to give him reward for each and every Divine utterance [which Avraham would then follow with blind faith, not knowing where God was leading him]. The same applies to the command, “Take your son, your only one, whom you love – Yitzchak” to “one of the mountains which I shall tell you” (*Bereishit* 22:2).

In other words, the avoidance of mentioning the exact place in the story of the *Akeida* is similarly meant to make the place beloved to Avraham, and to reward him for his faith in fulfilling each and every Divine word, even though he did not know where he was going.

In summary, we have looked at two similar approaches which posit that the fact that the Torah does not precisely define the place (the site of the *Akeida* or the place which God will choose) is meant to create a more significant connection with it. The *Sifri* emphasizes the obligation of human quest, while Rashi focuses on how this increases human longing and love for the place and the reward that it brings – the reward for each and every Divine utterance.

3. The Abarbanel (*Devarim* 12:4) writes:

The holy place must be one, like the Oneness of the blessed God Who dwells there; it cannot be many, like the places of the other nations... It is also necessary that the choice of the place be God's, as conveyed by a prophet, and not whatever the servants choose; this is the meaning of the phrase, “Which the Lord your God will choose from all of your tribes.”

The Abarbanel is emphasizing two points:

- a. the place that God will choose must be “one,” not like the places of idolatry, which are numerous; and
- b. since the place is to be chosen by God, there is no need to spell out its location.

This explanation is, in some sense, the opposite of the *Sifri's* explanation. According to the *Sifri*, the concealment is meant to lead to longing, seeking and searching on man's part, based on the idea that man must be an active and central partner in revealing the Divine choice. Abarbanel, however, claims that the Torah avoids explicit indication precisely because the Divine choice is exclusive; man is not party to it.

4. The *Keli Yakar* (*Devarim* 12:4) writes:

It seems that the reason God did not reveal it is so that *Bnei Yisrael* would not look upon Shilo and Nov and Givon with scorn when they found out for certain that none of these was the permanent site of the Temple.

According to *Keli Yakar*, the words “the place which God will choose” refer to Jerusalem – the permanent and final station – exclusively, and the Torah refrains from revealing this place in order to prevent any disrespect, or sense of temporariness, concerning all the stations along the way – i.e., all those temporary sites where the *Mishkan* was located up until the move to Jerusalem.[9]

In summary: in addressing the question of why the Pentateuch fails to mention Jerusalem explicitly, we concluded that this concealment is deliberate. This phenomenon may be interpreted in different ways: prevention of strife or destruction of the place by the nations of the world; a desire to arrive at the place with internal unity; arriving at the place on the strength of the person who will rule over all of Israel; the need for *Am Yisrael* to seek out the place; the exclusivity of the Divine choice, and the desire to avoid scorn of the stations on the way to Jerusalem. Each of these explanations emphasizes a different aspect of the significance of Jerusalem; they do not contradict one another, but rather are mutually complementary. All of these views explain why Jerusalem and the Temple are to be viewed as a place of unity of all of Israel, as a place of kingship, and as a place that must be sought.^[10] Indeed, in the Torah, Jerusalem includes all of these aspects.

[1] This identification is based upon the parallel between “*Shalem*” and “*Zion*” in *Tehillim* 76:3 – “His tabernacle shall be in Shalem, and His dwelling place in Zion.”

[2] The identification of Mount Moriah with Jerusalem is explicit in *Divrei Ha-yamim* II 3:1, in the context of the building of the First Temple on Mount Moriah.

[3] The expression, “the place that God will choose” (as, for example, in *Devarim* 12:5 and onwards), refers to the whole city of Jerusalem, for it is also mentioned in relation to *kodashim kalim* and *ma’aser sheni*, which may be eaten anywhere within the city. However, the Rambam – in his *Guide of the Perplexed* (see below) – refers specifically to Mount Moriah, even though he makes mention of the same expression. In any event, the mysterious concealment of the place applies equally to the city of Jerusalem and Mount Moriah.

[4] Recall that the Rambam lived in the 12th century, and in his lifetime Jerusalem was conquered twice, first by the Crusaders, and later by the Moslems.

[5] See *Bava Kama* 82b; *Yoma* 12a; *Sota* 45b.

[6] See Rambam, *Hilkhhot Avodat Kokhavim* 4:4; *Hilkhhot Beit Ha-bechira* 7:14; *Hilkhhot Tumat Tzara’at* 14:11; *Hilkhhot Rotze’ach* 9:4.

[7] See *Sifri Devarim*, Finkelstein edition, section 352 (*Ve-zot Ha-berakha* 33:12).

[8] In this regard, we must emphasize the relationship between the obligation to seek out a place, and the sanctity of the place. Concerning Mount Sinai, the Torah teaches, “When the shofar blast is long, they may ascend the mountain” (*Shemot* 19:13). In other words, at the conclusion of the Revelation, the place loses its sanctity. The same applied, later on, to the *Mishkan*; there is no evidence in any one of the dozens of stations in the wilderness that there was a prior selection of the place for the *Mishkan*. The sanctity of the site of the *Mishkan* – in all of the nation’s journeys – was dependent upon Divine Revelation, and the moment that the Revelation (in the form of the pillar of cloud) ceased and *Bnei Yisrael* journeyed to the next station, the sanctity of the place was nullified.

In contrast to Mount Sinai and the *Mishkan*, the sanctity of the site of Mount Moriah is not dependent upon Revelation; it arises, rather, from the Divine choice of that spot at the time of the Creation, and the place that God chose is the place where the Temple must be built. This assertion sits well with the opinion of the Rambam and some of the *Rishonim*, who maintain that when it comes to Jerusalem and the Temple, the original status of holiness with which the place was invested by *Bnei Yisrael* served to sanctify it for that time and forever afterwards. In other words, the sanctity of this place exists even without any direct connection to the structure that is built upon it.

This subject is a broad one, and I have merely hinted at it here in order to emphasize that it is no coincidence that there is a place that is destined to be the site of the Temple. The place exists, it is known and it is chosen, and God chose not to reveal it in order that *Am Yisrael* would be full partners in seeking, investigating, and revealing it – as the *Sifri* teaches.

[9] It should be mentioned that according to the *Seder Olam Rabba*, the *Mishkan* stood in Shilo for 369 years – a considerable period.

[10] It should further be mentioned, in this context, that one of the names of Jerusalem is “*Derusha*” (“sought after”): “They shall be called the holy nation, God’s redeemed, and you shall be called ‘*Derusha*’ – a city not abandoned” (*Yishayahu* 62:12). The Radak explains: “‘*Derusha*’ – the opposite of what you used to be called: ‘This is Zion; none seeks her out.’” The *Metzudat David* comments, “‘*Derusha*’ – God seeks her welfare, and she is not abandoned by Him.”