

The Unification of Jerusalem

Yerushalayim was first established as the capital of the Jewish state by David HaMelech approximately 3,000 years ago, when he chose to build his royal palace there¹ and later made it the home of the Ark of the Covenant.²

Originally though, David was granted the kingship in Chevron:

וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל שְׁבֵטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל דָּוִד בְּחֶבְרוֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְאֹמֶר הֲנֵנוּ עֲצֻמָּה וּבְשָׂרָךְ אֲנִיחֵנוּ. גַּם אֶתְמוּל גַּם שְׁלֹשׁוֹם בְּהִיּוֹת שָׂאוּל מֶלֶךְ עָלֵינוּ אֶתָּה הֵייתָ הַמוֹצִיא וְהַמְבִּיא אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר ה' לְךָ אֶתָּה תִרְעָה אֶת עַמִּי אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶתָּה תִּהְיֶה לְנֶגֶד עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל. וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל זְקֵנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּחֶבְרוֹן וַיִּכְרַת לָהֶם הַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד בְּרִית בְּחֶבְרוֹן לִפְנֵי ה' וַיִּמְשְׁחוּ אֶת דָּוִד לְמֶלֶךְ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל.

All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "We are your own flesh and blood. Long before now, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led Israel in war; and the LORD said to you: You shall shepherd My people Israel; you shall be ruler of Israel." All the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a pact with them in Hebron before the LORD. And they anointed David king over Israel.

Shmuel II 5:1-3

But once he assumed the kingship, he conquered Yerushalayim and established his capital there:

בְּיָמָיו שָׁנָה דָּוִד בְּמַלְכוּתוֹ אֶרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה מֶלֶךְ. בְּחֶבְרוֹן מֶלֶךְ עַל יְהוּדָה שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים וְשֵׁשׁ חֳדָשִׁים וּבִירוּשָׁלַם מֶלֶךְ שְׁלֹשִׁים וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנָה עַל



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כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְהוּדָה. וַיִּלְךָ הַמֶּלֶךְ וַאֲנָשָׁיו יְרוּשָׁלַם אֶל הַיְבֵסִי יוֹשֵׁב הָאָרֶץ וַיֹּאמֶר לְדָוִד לֵאמֹר לֹא תָבוֹא הִנֵּה כִּי אִם הִסְרִיף הָעוֹרִים וְהַפְסָחִים לֵאמֹר לֹא יָבוֹא דָוִד הִנֵּה. וַיִּלְכֹּד דָּוִד אֶת מִצְדַּת צִיּוֹן הִיא עִיר דָּוִד. וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כָּל מִכָּה יְבֵסִי וַיִּגַע בְּצַנּוֹר וְאֶת הַפְסָחִים וְאֶת הָעוֹרִים שָׁנְאֵי נִפֵּשׁ דָּוִד עַל כֵּן יֹאמְרוּ עוֹר וּפֶסֶח לֹא יָבוֹא אֶל הַבַּיִת. וַיֵּשֶׁב דָּוִד בְּמִצְדָּה וַיִּקְרָא לָהּ עִיר דָּוִד וַיִּבְנוּ דָוִד סָבִיב מִן הַמְּלֹא וּבְיָתָהּ. וַיִּלְךְ דָּוִד הַלּוֹךְ וְגָדוֹל וְה' אֶל-לְקֵי צָבָאוֹת עִמּוֹ.

David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years. The king and his men set out for Jerusalem against the Jebusites who inhabited the region ... David captured the stronghold of Zion; it is now the City of David ... David occupied the stronghold and renamed it the City of David; David also fortified the surrounding area, from the Millo inward. David kept growing stronger, for the LORD, the God of Hosts, was with him.

Shmuel II 5:4-10

The text, however, does not describe David's motivation for this shift. Why did he choose to move his throne to Yerushalayim? Radak suggests

that he possessed a tradition that Yerushalayim would be the capital of sovereign Israel:

וכיון שמלך על כל ישראל הלך אל ירושלים ללכוד מצודת ציון לפי שהיתה קבלה אצלם כי ציון ראש ממלכת ישראל.

Since he was now king over all of Israel he went to Jerusalem to conquer the citadel of Zion because they had a tradition that Zion was the head of kingship in Israel.

Radak, Shmuel II 5:6

Perhaps he was also aware of the tradition that Akeidat Yitzchak took place in Yerushalayim,³ and knew that Yerushalayim was the "place that Hashem will choose" mentioned in Sefer Devarim⁴ as the location of the future Beit HaMikdash,⁵ as well as the spiritual center of the world⁶ and the gateway to heaven.⁷

But the text does not imply that David had any secret traditions unmentioned in the text.⁸ If he was indeed looking for the site of the future Beit HaMikdash, it is unlikely that he would have chosen Yerushalayim. After all, Yerushalayim is not mentioned by name in the Torah even once. The Torah states merely that the



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Mikdash will be built in the “place that Hashem will choose,” implying that the location will be revealed through prophecy when its time comes.⁹ If David sought an appropriately holy site in the Torah, he could have picked Bet El, which is explicitly described as “the house of God” and “the gateway to heaven,”¹⁰ or even his original capital of Chevron, the residence and eternal burial place of our forefathers and foremothers.

Perhaps for this reason, Malbim assumes that David’s motivation was political rather than theological. Chevron was the capital of the tribe of Yehudah, and was located in the heart of Judean territory, far from the other tribes. All twelve tribes had agreed to accept David as their king even if he ruled from afar, but David knew that his choice of capital would send a clear message to the entire Jewish people. Throughout the book of Shoftim, the tribes were not unified,¹¹ and at times were even at war with one another.¹² The Jews were finally unified under King Shaul, from the tribe of Binyamin, and then the kingship was taken from him and bestowed upon David. How would David conceptualize his kingship? Did he represent his own tribe of Yehudah, and see his anointment as the victory of Yehudah over Binyamin? Did he rule the entire Jewish nation because Yehudah deserved to rule over the other tribes? This would have been exactly the message he sent had he established his capital in Chevron. But David rose above partisan politics and made a bold decision. Yerushalayim was on the border of Yehudah and Binyamin,¹³ straddling the two tribes who vied for leadership of the Jewish people:

אחר שעתה התאחדו שני ממלכות ישראל, שהיו עד עתה שבט יהודה תחת דוד, ויתר

השבטים ובנימין שבט שאול בראשם תחת איש בושת, ושבו כולם למלכות אחת תחת דוד, היה מן העצה, וכן הופיע רצון ה', שער המלוכה תהיה בגבול השייך לשני השבטים שהיו שבטי מלכות, וזה היה בירושלים שהיתה חציה ליהודה וחציה לבנימין כמ"ש בגבולי הארץ, וכמ"ש חז"ל (יומא יב א) רצועה היתה יוצאה מחלקו של יהודה לחלקו של בנימין ובו מזבח בנוי.

And the king and his men went to Jerusalem — Once the two kingships within Israel had been united, because until now the tribe of Yehudah was under David and the remaining tribes (led by Shaul's tribe Binyamin) were under Ishboshet, and they became one kingdom under David it seemed right, and thus was the will of God, that the royal city should lie on a boundary that was connected to both kingly tribes. This was Jerusalem, which lay half in Yehudah and half in Binyamin as is written in the description of the borders of the land, and as the Sages taught “a strip protruded from the portion of Yehudah into the portion of Binyamin and on it the altar was built.” (Yoma 12a)

Malbim, Shmuel II 5:6

Yerushalayim represents the unity of the Jewish people, and the ability to transcend our political divisions in the name of the eternity of the nation.

David demonstrated forcefully and dramatically that now that he was anointed as king of Israel, he no longer belonged to his kin and political allies, but to Klal Yisrael, to the Jewish nation. Perhaps for this reason, David is known to this very day as the

quintessential Jewish king and the progenitor of Mashiach.

King David may have paid a terrible price for this bold decision. We can only imagine that the political and military leadership in Chevron, who had stood by David in difficult times and now expected to reap the fruits of their investment by ruling over the other eleven tribes, were disappointed by what they saw as the naive idealism of David; in their small-mindedness, they may even have felt betrayed by him. It is no wonder, then, that when David’s son Avshalom decided to rebel against his father and usurp the throne, he found willing allies in Chevron, and declared his rebellion there:

וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְשָׁלוֹם אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲלֶכָה נָא וְאַשְׁלֵם אֶת נְדָרַי אֲשֶׁר נְדַרְתִּי לָהּ בְּחֶבְרוֹן: כִּי נָדַר עֲבָדְךָ בְּשִׁבְתִּי בְּגִשּׁוֹר בְּאֶרֶם לֵאמֹר אִם יָשִׁיב יְשׁוּב יִשִּׁיבֵנִי ה' וְרוּשְׁלָם וְעַבְדְּתִי אֶת ה': וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ לֹךְ בְּשָׁלוֹם וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ חֶבְרוֹנָה: וַיִּשְׁלַח אַבְשָׁלוֹם מֵרְגָלִים בְּכָל שְׁבֵטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר קְשָׁמְעוּכֶם אֶת קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר וְאַמַּרְתֶּם מֶלֶךְ אַבְשָׁלוֹם בְּחֶבְרוֹן:

After a period of forty years had gone by, Absalom said to the king, “Let me go to Hebron and fulfill a vow that I made to the LORD. For your servant made a vow when I lived in Geshur of Aram: If the LORD ever brings me back to Jerusalem, I will worship the LORD.” The king said to him, “Go in peace”; and so he set out for Hebron. But Absalom sent agents to all the tribes of Israel to say, “When you hear the blast of the horn, announce that Absalom has become king in Hebron.”

Shmuel II 15:7-10

Thus began the darkest and most difficult episode of David’s life, and we might imagine that it would not have happened if David had kept his capital in Chevron. But a great leader is one who makes the right decision even if he may pay a great personal price.

Yerushalayim, then, represents first and foremost the unity of the Jewish people, and the ability to transcend our political divisions in the name of the eternity of the nation. Perhaps for that very reason, Hashem decided to establish the Beit HaMikdash there, as the Beit HaMikdash represents Hashem's presence dwelling among not a faction or sect of the Jewish people, but Klal Yisrael. The halacha is established in accordance with the opinion that *Yerushalayim lo nitchalka leshevatim*, Yerushalayim is not the inheritance of specific tribes, or of its individual residents, but rather the national heritage of the Jewish people.¹⁴

As long as the Beit HaMikdash stood in Yerushalayim, it served as a source of religious unity among the Jewish people. Since there was only one eternal capital of the Jewish people, and one Beit HaMikdash in its center, the great Sanhedrin sitting there was the ultimate religious authority. There was no possibility, as there is nowadays, for competing halachic authorities in competing religious centers, because there was only one central location that bestowed ultimate authority on those who convened there:¹⁵

כשהיה בית דין הגדול קיים לא היתה מחלוקת בישראל, אלא כל דין שנולד בו ספק לאחד מישראל שואל לבית דין שבעירו אם ידעו אמרו לו אם לאו הרי השואל עם אותו בית דין או עם שלוחיו עולין לירושלים ושואלין לבית דין שבהר הבית אם ידעו אמרו לו אם לאו הכל באין לבית דין שעל פתח העזרה, אם ידעו אמרו להן ואם לאו הכל באין ללשכת הגזית לבית דין הגדול ושואלין, אם היה הדבר שנולד בו הספק לכל, ידוע אצל בית דין הגדול בין מפי הקבלה בין מפי המדה שדנו בה אומרים מיד, אם לא היה הדבר ברור אצל בית דין הגדול דנין בו בשעתו ונושאים ונותנים בדבר עד שיסכימו כולן, או יעמדו למנין וילכו אחר הרוב ויאמרו לכל השואלים כך הלכה והולכין

להן, משבטל בית דין הגדול רבתה מחלוקת בישראל זה מטמא ונותן טעם לדבריו וזה מסהר ונותן טעם לדבריו זה אוסר וזה מתיה. *When the Supreme Sanhedrin was in session, there was never any prolonged difference of opinion among the Jewish people. Instead, if a doubt arose in a Jew's mind over any law, he would inquire of the court in his city. If not, the questioner and that court — or its agents — ascend to Jerusalem and ask the court which holds sessions on the Temple Mount. If they know, they will reply to him, if they do not know, everyone comes to the court that holds sessions at the entrance to the Temple Courtyard. If they know, they will reply to him, if they do not know, everyone comes to the Chamber of Hewn Stone, to the Supreme Sanhedrin, and presents the question. If the matter that was unresolved by all the others was known to the Supreme Sanhedrin — either as part of the Oral Tradition or because of its derivation through the principles of exegesis — they relate the decision immediately. If, however, the decision was unclear to the Supreme Sanhedrin, they deliberate about the matter at that time and debate it back and forth until they reach a uniform decision, or until a vote is taken. In such a situation, they follow the majority and then tell all the questioners: "This is the halacha." The questioners then all depart. After the Supreme Sanhedrin was nullified, differences of opinion multiplied among the Jewish people. One would rule an article is impure and support his ruling with a rationale and another would rule that it is pure and support his ruling with a rationale. This one would rule an article is forbidden and this would rule that it is permitted.*

Rambam, Hilchot Mamrim 1:4
(translated by R. Eliyahu Touger—Chabad.org)

Not only did Yerushalayim ensure

unity among different schools of halachic thought, but the power of Yerushalayim even bridged the gap between those who were dedicated to halachic observance and those who were not fully observant. In Talmudic times, the Jews were divided into two religious classes, the *chaverim*, who were punctilious about ritual purity, and the *amei ha'aretz*, who neglected these (and other) halachot. Generally, a *chaver* would refrain somewhat from contact with the person and property of an *am ha'aretz*, for fear of contracting ritual impurity. But when Klal Yisrael came together in Yerushalayim on the three pilgrimage holidays, these halachic restrictions were relaxed, and all Jews were considered equally trustworthy in halachic matters. The Talmud Yerushalmi explains that this unity was brought about through the unifying power of Yerushalayim:¹⁶

ובירושלם נאמנין על הקודש ובשעת הרגל אף על התרומה ... אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי ירושלם הבנויה כעיר שחבורה לה יחדיו עיר שהיא עושה כל ישראל חברים

And in Jerusalem they are reliable even with regard to sacred items, and during the pilgrimage festivals even with regard to terumah ... Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: "Jerusalem built up, a city knit together" (Psalms 122:3) — A city that makes all Israel friends (chaverim).

Talmud Yerushalmi, Chagigah 3:6

To this very day, we experience the unifying power of Yerushalayim three times a day, when Jews worldwide turn to Yerushalayim in prayer:

היה עומד בחוץ לארץ - יכוין את לבו כנגד ארץ ישראל שנאמר: (מלכים א' ח') והתפללו אליך דרך ארצם; היה עומד בארץ ישראל - יכוין את לבו כנגד ירושלים, שנאמר: (מלכים א' ח') והתפללו אל ה' דרך העיר אשר בחרת. *One who was standing in the Diaspora should focus his heart toward Eretz*

Yisrael, as it is stated: "And they shall pray to You by way of their land" (I Kings 8:48). One who was standing in Eretz Yisrael should focus his heart toward Jerusalem, as it is stated: "And they shall pray to the Lord by way of the city that You have chosen" (I Kings 8:44).

Talmud Bavli, Berachot 30a

We do so not only because Yerushalayim is the conduit to the heavenly realms, but in order to emphasize the unity of the Jewish people. Although we stand in different synagogues, with different customs, cultures, and standards, spread among six continents, we pray not merely as individuals or congregations, but as one Jewish people:¹⁷

נמצא: עומד במזרח — מחזיר פניו למערב,
במערב - מחזיר פניו למזרח, בדרום —
מחזיר פניו לצפון, בצפון — מחזיר פניו
לדרום; נמצאו כל ישראל מכוונים את לבם
למקום אחד.

Consequently, one standing in the East turns to face west, and one standing in the West, turns to face east. One standing in the South, turns to face north, and one standing in the North, turns to face south; all of Israel find themselves focusing their hearts toward one place.

Talmud Bavli, Berachot 30a

This year, we have the unique privilege of celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the re-unification of Yerushalayim as the capital of the State of Israel. We will praise and thank Hashem for the miracle of the Six-Day War and the gift of Jewish sovereignty over an undivided Jerusalem. But we

must also remember that the essence of Yerushalayim is found not in geographical or political boundaries, but in the unity that Yerushalayim creates within the Jewish people. To merit the complete rebuilding of Jerusalem, we must rededicate ourselves to enhancing unity within the Jewish people by transcending our partisan divisions and embracing the eternity of Jewish peoplehood. Those who have the privilege of residing in the environs of Yerushalayim must radiate inclusiveness and brotherly love, and those dwelling afar must respond by turning our hearts in the direction of togetherness and a feeling of fellowship with all those who pray toward Yerushalayim. In this "unification of Yerushalayim" lies the secret to our eternity, and in its merit may we see the speedy fulfillment of our heartfelt prayer:

ולירושלים עירך ברחמים תשוב ותשכון
בתוכה כאשר דברת ובנה אותה בקרוב בימינו
בנין עולם.

To Jerusalem Your city may You return with mercy and dwell in the midst of it as You have spoken, and build it soon and in our day as an eternal structure.

Endnotes

- 1 Shmuel II ch. 5.
- 2 Shmuel II ch. 6.
- 3 Rashi, Bereishit 22:2.
- 4 Ch. 12 v. 5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26; ch. 14 v. 23, 24, 25; ch. 15 v. 20; ch. 16 v. 2, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16; ch. 17 v. 8, 10; ch. 18 v. 6; ch. 26 v. 2; ch. 31 v. 11.
- 5 Rambam, in *Moreh Nevuchim* III:45, assumes that Moshe Rabbenu and many

others knew this tradition, but he does not discuss whether King David was among them.

6 *Midrash Tanchuma, Kedoshim* 10.

7 *Bereishit Rabbah* 69:7.

8 *Chazon Ish, Yoma* 126:8, asserts that it is the universal opinion of the Sages that it was not known beforehand that Yerushalayim would be the future site of the Beit HaMikdash.

9 *Sifrei, Devarim* 62.

10 Bereishit 28:17. It is likely that Yeravam was inspired by this verse to establish one of his two temples in Bet El. It was not difficult for him to convince the Ten Tribes that it was more logical to worship in Bet El, where Hashem revealed himself to Yaakov, and Yaakov built a monument and offered sacrifices, than in Yerushalayim, which was declared holy a mere two generations ago by prophets from the court of David.

11 See e.g., 5:14-18.

12 See e.g., 12:1-6, 20:12-48.

13 Yehoshua 15:63 and 18:28. See Talmud Bavli, *Yoma* 12a.

14 Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Beit HaBechirah* 7:14, based on the Gemara *Yoma* 12a and *Bava Kama* 82b. For an elucidation of this topic, see <http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/870312/rabbi-assaf-bednarsh/who-owns-yerushalayim/>.

15 See Talmud Bavli *Sanhedrin* 14b and *Avodah Zarah* 8b — *melamed shehamakom gorem*.

16 See the full passage in the Talmud Yerushalmi there, and compare to Talmud Bavli, *Chagigah* 26a; Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Metamei Mishkav Umoshav* 11:9-11.

17 See also Talmud Bavli *Berachot* 29b-30a, and Rashi there s.v. *lishatef nafshei*, for an application of this principle with regard to the language of prayer. See also Talmud Bavli *Shabbat* 12a-12b, and Rashi there s.v. *betoch cholei yisrael*.



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