

שָׁלוֹם shalom

Do you know the meaning of the word שָׁלוֹם *shalom*, which is pronounced ‘*shah-LOM*’? Many of us would probably answer, ‘Yes!’ saying that it means ‘peace’. Others would be able to add that the root letters—ש (shin), ל (lamed), מ (mem)—convey the concept of ‘completeness, wholeness, soundness, wellbeing’. But my guess is that few, if any, of us have yet plumbed the full depths of this rich Hebrew word. Indeed, in their letter to the Philippian Believers, Paul and Timothy **finishing** said that God’s שָׁלוֹם *shalom* ‘passes all understanding’, or to use modern parlance, it’s ‘incredible’, ‘unbelievable’, ‘extraordinary’! How comforting to know, therefore, that *‘the shalom of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Messiah Yeshua’* (Phil 4⁷)!

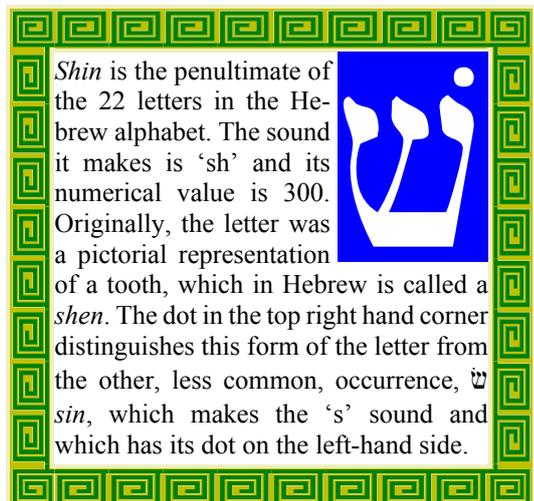
When we begin to understand the Hebrew terms which lie behind our English translations of the Bible, it opens up a whole new world of exciting and meaningful discovery. Words which we formerly understood to have a narrow, specific application, suddenly become for us like jewels which, though pure in form, are beautiful because their various aspects catch the light in multiple ways. No more so is this the case, than with the word שָׁלוֹם *shalom*. Mostly, it has been rendered ‘peace’, yet the Hebrew concept of *shalom* carries a range of ideas, formed around the root meaning of ‘wholeness’.

For instance, there can be שָׁלוֹם *shalom* in our relationship with God when we confess our wrongdoing and turn to Him in repentance; there is the שָׁלוֹם *shalom* of good friends, or the שָׁלוֹם *shalom* forged between nations; שָׁלוֹם *shalom* for a city means safety and security; שָׁלוֹם *shalom* in finances means clearing your debts; שָׁלוֹם *shalom* **wholeness** for the body means healing and rest; שָׁלוֹם *shalom* for the soul means salvation and wellbeing.

Did you know that one of the special names attributed to God (by Gideon) is שָׁלוֹם יהוה *Yahweh Shalom*, ‘The LORD is Shalom’ (Jud 6²⁴)? This reminds us that wholeness, soundness and perfection are central to His wonderful nature. He is the source of true wellbeing, He is the healer of body and soul, He is the restorer of the broken-hearted, He is the strong tower in whom there is safety and security, He is the Beginning and the End, in Him all of creation is held together, and He **soundness** will bring all His good plans to completion.

No wonder, then that one of the titles of the Messiah is שָׁר־שָׁלוֹם *Sar Shalom*, ‘Prince of Shalom’ (Isa 9⁶). For Jeremiah declared that the LORD planned שָׁלוֹם *shalom* for His people (Jer 29¹¹), and Isaiah tells us that ‘the punishment that brought us שָׁלוֹם *shalom* was upon Him, and by His wounds **wellbeing** we are healed’ (Isa 53⁵). Indeed, when Yeshua was about to breathe His last, He made a profoundly significant utterance, perhaps with the single Hebrew word נִשְׁלַם *nishlam*, which is normally rendered, ‘it is finished’, but which we might paraphrase, ‘*Shalom* is restored’ (John 19³⁰). And after His resurrection the Master greeted His disciples with the words, ‘*Shalom* be with you’ (Luke 24³⁶).

Shin is the penultimate of the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. The sound it makes is ‘sh’ and its numerical value is 300. Originally, the letter was a pictorial representation of a tooth, which in Hebrew is called a *shen*. The dot in the top right hand corner distinguishes this form of the letter from the other, less common, occurrence, ש *sin*, which makes the ‘s’ sound and which has its dot on the left-hand side.



So with the Psalmist, we who have looked to Messiah for salvation, **safety** can heartily cry, *'the Lord blesses His people with shalom'* (Ps 29¹¹). As we said at the outset, it is indeed a 'peace' which passes understanding, a 'peace' which will stay with us, so long as we remain in Him, trusting in His mercy, faithfulness, and power to deliver: *'You will keep in perfect shalom him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD for ever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal'* (Isaiah 26:3-4). So even in times of trouble and distress, when all is said and done at the end of the day, we can confidently echo David's **security** assurance that, *'I will lie down and sleep in shalom, for You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety'* (Ps 4⁸).

Finally, let us never forget to plead for the *'shalom of Jerusalem'* (Ps 122⁶), understanding of course that what we ask for is far and above the kind of cease-fires and temporary treaties which the leaders of nations strive to impose upon God's land. What we seek for the nation of Israel and all who dwell in her, is nothing less than the שְׁלוֹם *shalom* which comes from the **peace** governance of the שֶׁר־שְׁלוֹם *Sar Shalom*, the 'Prince of Shalom'. He, and only He, is able to bring lasting restoration and wholeness, security and wellbeing to His land and His people. As we look to Him for that future and full manifestation of שְׁלוֹם *shalom*, let us also in the meantime, as priestly citizens of the Kingdom over which He is sovereign, bless one another with the words of Num 6²⁶: *'The LORD turn His face towards you and give you shalom'*.

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