“And the Name of the City from that Day on: ‘YHWH’ is there” (Ezek. 48:35)

A new suggestion [Key Words: Ezekiel, Nippur, Jerusalem]

1. ‘YHWH’ is there: The meaning of the combination

The last verse in the book of Ezekiel, which concludes his vision of the future, is central to understanding a theme found throughout the chapters of the book - the departure of the glory of God from the Temple, and its return.[[1]](#footnote-1) The book ends climactically with the renamed Temple-city, which emphasizes this theme"ה' **שָֽׁמָּ**ה"- “YHWH is there” (48:35).[[2]](#footnote-2) The accepted explanation of the name of the city is that God, who has abandoned the city, will return to it in the future and will remain there.

The uniqueness of the name of the city and its meaning, along with the linguistic difficulty of its use in the verse,[[3]](#footnote-3) is reflected in the diversity of translations and commentaries on this verse through the ages.[[4]](#footnote-4) Thus, for example, Zimmerli in his commentary notes: "without sonorous phraseology one cannot postulate a direction in **שָֽׁמָּ**ה".[[5]](#footnote-5) First, it is unclear if the city being referred to is Jerusalem. Second, while the future temple vision repeatedly describes the return of God's glory to the temple area, this passage would seem to indicate a broader scope—the return of God’s presence to the entire city.[[6]](#footnote-6)

These difficulties, in understanding the verse, are reflected in early translations. The Septuagint reads **"שְׁמָ**הּ" ("its name") instead of "**שָֽׁמָּ**ה" ("there"), so that the phrase rather than reading "the place in which God is present", should be read as the city's name, that is: "the name of the city is the name God himself, YHWH".[[7]](#footnote-7) Whereas Targum Jonathan understands the verse as follows: "וּשְׁמָא דְקַרְתָּא דְמִתְפָּרֵישׁ מִיוֹמָא דִי יִשְׁרֵי ה' שְׁכִנְתֵּיהּ תַּמָן" -“And the name of the city, designated from the day that the Lord makes His Shekinah rest upon it, there”– in other words, this has always been the city’s name. The rabbinic Jewish interpreters followed the Septuagint's interpretation when they derived from this verse that Jerusalem is called after the name of God.[[8]](#footnote-8) This explanation can also be found in modern commentary. Kasher, for example, suggests that the verse is an attempted etymology of the name "Jerusalem". [[9]](#footnote-9)

However, in my opinion, the content of the future temple vision points to the opposite conclusion: Ezekiel intended to change the name of the city.[[10]](#footnote-10) To eradicate the use of the name "Jerusalem", not explain it. From his perspective, the name "Jerusalem" had only negative connotations.[[11]](#footnote-11) Furthermore, none of the aforementioned interpretations explain the verse as it appears in the Masoretic Text:"ה' **שָֽׁמָּ**ה" - “YHWH is There” the geographical location in which God can be found. Because of the uniqueness of this phrase as the name of a biblical city, I would like to suggest that it was in order to emphasize that God returned to his city and is present in it, even though it is no longer Jerusalem. The new name of the city was influenced, alongside biblical sources, by the Babylonian surroundings in which Ezekiel lived, and that on this basis we can discover the meaning of the name in its biblical context. [[12]](#footnote-12)

1. The Names of Babylonian Cities in Ezekiel's Time

In cuneiform sources from the sixth century BCE, the years that Ezekiel prophesied, it is not uncommon to find theophoric elements in local toponyms (the custom of representing a city's name by reference to its chief deity).[[13]](#footnote-13) A clear, but unique, example of this, is the city of Nippur. Nippur remained of considerable size and significance in NB times and thereafter.[[14]](#footnote-14) The city's written version, which reads literally as "Enlil Place", which is in fact pronounced "Nippur". Speakers of Aramaic, who did not read Akkadian, knew the city only as "Nippur" rather than in its written form, known only to the readers of cuneiform. The instance of the spelling of the name of Nippur is unique since (to my best knowledge) there is no other case in which the name of a city is identical with the name of a deity in written form only. However, on a broader cultural level, not related specifically to Nippur, cities in the region were commonly named after deities. There are cases, from the first millennium BCE of Babylonian cities bearing theophoric names. In some cases, the name of the god is included as part of the city or places’ name.[[15]](#footnote-15) In other cases the name of the god is identical with the name of the city.[[16]](#footnote-16) In contrast to the discrepancy between the written and oral forms of Nippur, the names of other cities, such as Assyria, are identical to the name of a god in both written and spoken form. Thus, it is important to emphasize that Nippur is not unique because it is named after a deity, but because the city-name is pronounced differently from the deity-name.[[17]](#footnote-17)

1. Did Ezekiel know Akkadian or read cuneiform?

The degree of Ezekiel's familiarity with the Babylonian culture it uncertain, and scholars disagree on the extent to which Jews living in Babylonia knew how to read and write Akkadian, if at all.[[18]](#footnote-18) Despite the growing use of Aramaic, Akkadian (and respectively, cuneiform) was prominent in the major Babylonian urban centres'.[[19]](#footnote-19) Thus there is no doubt that Ezekiel would have had sufficient exposure to both language and script, and a basic familiarity is very plausible, to say the least. [[20]](#footnote-20) This assumption is consistent with the growing body of research indicating Ezekiel's was connected to his Babylonian surroundings.[[21]](#footnote-21) Such, are the publications concerning the exiled Judean community of Al-Yahudu. [[22]](#footnote-22) From which we can draw that - the apparent proximity of the Ezekiel's accessibility to the Babylonian culture to Nippur, seems reasonable.[[23]](#footnote-23) The Chebar Canal and the town Tel-aviv situated on it are the location of Ezekiel’s activity (Ezek.1:1-3; 3:15). In addition, the appearance of the name of the canal in the Murashu archive seemed to secure its location in the Nippur region.[[24]](#footnote-24) Therefore, the urban Babylonian center, where educated and religious culture was accessible was Nippur. This was a religious center that the Judean exiles were exposed to. However, in the case of the city's name even basic knowledge would have enabled Ezekiel excesses to the form of writing the name of the city of Nippur. Since the written form of the city is less abstruse than some of the other city names, it is plausible that this could have caught the eye of Ezekiel, although he may have been less literate, or perhaps with only immediate knowledge of Nippur. Thus said, there remains the considerable issue of establishing the pipeline by which this knowledge could have been acquired by an Israelite/Judean/Jewish literates.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Nevertheless, if Ezekiel was in contact with members of the Babylonian elite, and was an expert in cuneiform writing, it is possible to deepen this comparison. The name of the city is rendered in cuneiform as EN.LÍLki The first part, written with the logograms EN.LÍL, represents the name of the city, and the second part, the sign ki, is a determinative, marking the word as a geographical name.[[26]](#footnote-26) The two signs, EN.LÍL, when not attached to the determinative ki (but preceded by a divine determinative), signify the divine name "Enlil", the patron deity of Nippur. If Ezekiel was familiar with cuneiform, when he read the name of the city of Nippur, he would have seen the signs "EN.LÍL", identical to the signs of the name of the god, followed by a sign indicating that this was the name of a city. [[27]](#footnote-27)

To conclude, the cuneiform spelling of the name of Nippur and its meaning may have served as the model for the name Ezekiel gave to the new city, which would replace Jerusalem, built on its ruins. If so, "ה' **שָֽׁמָּ**ה" represents the following: "YHWH", the name of God, which is also the name of the city. And the addition of the word " **שָֽׁמָּ**ה"-(there), functioning like a cuneiform determinative, indicating that in this case the name of God is being used as a geographical place name. Thus, the city mentioned at the end of the book of Ezekiel merits, from that day on, to be called by the name of its God, YHWH. It was Ezekiel's knowledge with regard to the name of the city of Nippur written by the name of Enlil, and a theological reason that led him to use ‘YHWH’ is there” for the holy city.[[28]](#footnote-28) If this was the case, to imitate this form, Ezekiel would have had to be literate in cuneiform and not just familiar with Akkadian.[[29]](#footnote-29)

If this suggestion is correct, it would appear to resolve not just linguistic difficulties but also the difficulties in understanding the verse’s meaning. Although in Ezekiel's temple vision, God's glory returns to the temple alone, the entire city is called by the name of God, as indicated by the word **שָֽׁמָּ**ה"". However, this city is not Jerusalem—but rather a new, future city atop its ruins—and God is not necessarily present in all parts of the city.[[30]](#footnote-30)

1. The underlying assumption of this study is that the prophecies under discussion were written (and possibly edited) by a prophet in the sixth century BCE. Moshe Greenberg is among the foremost proponents of this approach. See Moshe Greenberg*, Ezekiel 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Doubleday: New York, 1983), 18–27, and idem, “What are Valid Criteria for Determining Inauthentic Matter in Ezekiel?” in *Ezekiel and His Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and Their Interrelation*, ed. Johan Lust (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986), 123–135. See also Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, NICOT 1 and 2 (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997–1998), 1:17–23. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See: John F. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel* Biblical and Judaic Studies 7 (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2000) p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The syntax is problematic in the connection between the word "מיום" and the words "ה' שמה"; however, from an examination of biblical parallels it appears that the meaning of "מיום" is "from this day on", as in: "Take note, from this day forward—from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month" (Hag. 2:18). See also Ezra 3:6, Nehemiah 5:14, among other examples. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This combination of words appears in only one other place: "among all the peoples to which the Lord will drive you" (Deut. 28:37), but its meaning there is different. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See: W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2:* *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel Chapters 25-48,* trans. J. D. Martin (Hermeneia; Philadelphia, 1983), p. 545. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. With regard to the reference pointing to the city, and not the Temple see: P. Joyce, *Ezekiel: a Commentary*, Library of Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament Studies 482 (New York, 2007), p. 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Some have suggested that the translation in the Septuagint is either a misreading or is based on a different *Vorlage*. See: W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2:* *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel Chapters 25-48,* trans. J. D. Martin (Hermeneia; Philadelphia, 1983), p. 545 and D. I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48* (NICOT 2; Grand Rapids and Cambridge, 1998), p. 735, note 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra, 70b, based on this verse with the change in vocalization to "**שְׁמָ**ה". Rashi quotes the Targum and emphasizes that the city was founded in the days of Abraham. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. R. Kasher, *Ezekiel: Introduction and Commentary, Volume 2: Chapters 25–48* (Mikra LeYisraʹel: A Bible Commentary for Israel) (in Hebrew), (Tel Aviv, 2004), p. 934, and see G.A. Cooke, The Book of Ezekiel, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1985, pp. 538-539. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. "Name Theology" in the context of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History is typically discussed from an internal Biblical perspective, and is to say that YHWH is not present in his temple in any perceivable manifestation, instead, only his name dwells in the Temple.  This in contrast to P and Ezekiel which speak of God residing in a temple enveloped by his Kavod. Further Richter proposed the terms šakkēn šēm and śîm šēm respectively as a loan idiom and a calque from Akkadian *šuma šakānu* (< Sumerian MU GAR) meaning “inscribe/set up a monument bearing the name and proclaiming ownership and hegemony”, and is a loan idiom adapted from Akkadian *šuma šakānu* meaning “place the name”. Since Richter does not Includes Ezekiel 48:35 in here discussion, and the discussion here refers to other aspects of 'YHWH's Name' and does not discuss the form of the divine presence, I did not discuss her proposal in this framework. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Jerusalem's absence from Ezekiel's future temple prophecy is not coincidental. On this subject see, among others: J. Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel: The City as Yahweh’s Wife* (SBLDS 130 Atlanta, 1992). On the possibility that the location of the temple would change, see: M. Ben-Yashar, “The Merkava (Divine Chariot) and Mikdash Meˀat (Minor Sanctuary) in the Book of Ezekiel” (in Hebrew), in R. Kasher, et al (eds.) *Studies in the Bible and Exegesis* 4 (Ramat Gan, 1997), pp. 9-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For additional examples of a change in the name of Jerusalem due to the idolatry, see Hosea: 2: 18-19; For replacing the city's in order to mark a fundamental change within it see for example: Isiah 62:2, 12. Jeremiah 33:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See examples in notes 15-17 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. On the city of Nippur during the first millennium BCE, see A. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts* (OLA 40; Leuven, 1992), pp. 143-162; S. W. Cole, *Nippur in Late Assyrian Times c. 755-612 BC*. (SAAS 4; Helsinki, 1996). Regarding the size of the city see the archeological reports: Gibson, McG. 1992, Patterns of Occupation at Nippur, in: Ellis, M. deJ. (ed*.*), *Nippur at the Centennial. Papers Read at the 35e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Philadelphia*, 1988, Philadelphia: 33–54. For an overview of Nippur see: Nippur, in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie* 9, 1/2, Berlin: Walter de Druyter, 1998: 532–565. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. E.g., Ālu-ša-Amurru (UEU *šá* dKUR.GAL), Zadok, p. 8; Ālu-ša-Bēl (UEU *šá* d+EN), Zadok, p.9; Ālu-ša-Nabû (UEU *šá* dPA), Zadok, p.15.

It should be noted that every geographical name (city, village, etc.) is accompanied by an identifying determinative: "ki" following the word, in the case of large cities, or "uru" preceding it, in the case of smaller towns. There are places where it is not clear if the sign URU is used as the determinative uru, or is it a logogram to be read *ālu* meaning "town (of)". [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. E.g., Bānītāya (uru.dDÙ-*tú/u*4*-a-a),* Zadok, p.64; Bēl (uru.d.+EN; uruURU d+EN), Zadok, p. 73; Bēltiya (uru.d.GAŠAN-*ia*), Zadok, p. 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The ki sign following a city-name as a rule does not change the pronunciation of the deity-name. However, the ki following the word "EN.LIL" indicates that we are not to read "Enlil", but Nippur. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The answer to this question has ramifications for understanding the way Babylonian Jews, including scribes and prophets, were exposed to Akkadian inscriptions. See for example, Wilfred G. Lambert, “Some New Babylonian Wisdom Literature,” in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel. Essays in Honour of J.A. Emerton*, ed. John Day et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 30–42. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. On the place and role of Akkadian during the first millennium BCE see Paul-Alain Beaulieu, “Official andVernacular Languages: The Shifting Sands of Imperial and Cultural Identitiesin First-Millennium B.C. Mesopotamia,” in *Margins of Writing, Origins of Cultures*, ed. Seth L. Sanders (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2006), 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See Paul-Alain Beaulieu, “Official andVernacular Languages: The Shifting Sands of Imperial and Cultural Identitiesin First-Millennium B.C. Mesopotamia,” in *Margins of Writing, Origins of Cultures*, ed. Seth L. Sanders (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2006), 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Such as: D. S. Vanderhooft, “Ezekiel in and on Babylon,” in J. Elayi and J. Durand, (eds.), Bible et Proche-Orient. Mélanges André Lemaire III, Transeuphratène 46 (2014): 99–119; A. Winitzer, “Assyriology and Jewish Studies in Tel Aviv: Ezekiel among the Babylonian Literati,” in U. Gabbay and S. Secunda (eds.), *Encounters by the Rivers of Babylon: Scholarly Conversations between Jews, Iranians, and Babylonians*, (Tübingen, 2014), pp. 163–216; J. Stökl, “A Youth without Blemish, Handsome, Proficient in all Wisdom, Knowledgeable, and Intelligent: Ezekiel’s Access to Babylonian Culture,” in C. Waerzeggers and J. Stökl, (eds.), *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context*, (Berlin, 2015), pp. 223–252. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See For the location of Al-Yahudu in the vicinity of Nippur see Pearce and Wunsch 2014 (CUSAS 28): 6–7. And see Zilberg in press for further investigation of geography aspects in the Al-Yahudu texts; Zilberg, Peter. in press, Lands and Estates around āl-Yāhūdu and the Geographical Connection with the Murašû Archive, AfO 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. On the use of Akkadian in Ezekiel, see especially, in order of publication: Raymond-Jacques Tournay, “A propos des babylonismes d’Ezéchiel,” *RB* 68 (1961): 388–93; Stephen P. Garfinkel, “*Studies in Akkadian Influences in the Book of Ezekiel*” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1983); Peter Kingsley, “Ezekiel by the Grand Canal: Between Jewish and Babylonian Tradition,” *JRAS* 2 (1992): 339–346; Isaac Gluska, “Akkadian Influences on the Book of Ezekiel,” in *An Experienced Scribe Who Neglects Nothing: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Jacob Klein*, ed. Yitschak Sefati et al. (Bethesda: CDL Press, 2005), 718**–**737; Daniel Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and The Poem of Erra*, OBO 104 (Göttingen: Universitätsverlag; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991); David S. Vanderhooft, “Ezekiel in and on Babylon,” in Bible *et* Proche-Orient. Mélanges André Lemaire III, ed. Josette Elayi and Jean-Marie Durand, Transeuphratène 46 (2014), 99–119; Abraham Winitzer, “Assyriology and Jewish Studies in Tel Aviv: Ezekiel among the Babylonian Literati,” in *Encounters by the Rivers of Babylon: Scholarly Conversations between Jews, Iranians, and Babylonians*, ed. Uri Gabbay and Shai Secunda (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 163–216 ; Jonathan Stökl, “A Youth without Blemish, Handsome, Proficient in all Wisdom, Knowledgeable and Intelligent: Ezekiel’s Access to Babylonian Culture,” in *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context*, ed. Caroline Waerzeggers and Jonthan Stökl (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 223–252. See in addition, more general studies of Akkadian loan words, especially: Heinrich Zimmern, *Akkadische Fremdwörter als Beweis für babylonischen Kultureinfluss*,2nd ed. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1917); Paul V. Mankowski, *Akkadian Loanwords in Biblical Hebrew*, HSS 47 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000); Hayim Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion for Biblical Hebrew* (Jersey City: Ktav, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Laurie E. Pearce, "Continuity and Normality in Sources Relating to the Judean Exile", HeBAI 3 (2014), p.171; 180-181, see notes there for additional bibliography. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See Waerzeggers Caroline, Locating Contact in the Babylonian Exile: Some Reflections on Tracing Judean-Babylonian Encounters in Cuneiform Texts, in: Encounters by the Rivers of Babylon: Scholarly Conversations between Jews, Iranians and Babylonians in Antiquity. Edited by Uri Gabbay and Shai Secunda. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014, 131-146. In addition to other questions that we do not have the evidence to answer such as: should this proposal be addressed to the prophet himself, or could this be understood as a case of later scribal activity? And what would be the specific context of the acquisition of such knowledge? [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. When the name "Nippur" is written as "EN.LÍLki" there is no use of the determinative d (DINGIR)for divinity. See, R. Zadok, *Geographical Names According to New- and Late-Babylonian Texts*.(RGTC 8; Wiesbaden, 1985), pp. 239–242 for the different spellings of the name. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. This phenomenon is similar to/ paradigmatic, with Larsa, e.g., written UD.UNUG.˚, where UD is simply the sign for "sun" (utu) and unug the word for sanctuary (thus: 'city of Utu's sanctuary'), and the writing of Ur is understood as a representation of a sanctuary with the totem of that city's deity (Nanna/Sîn; same), and so forth. See: P. Michalowski, On the Early Toponymy of Sumer: A Contribution to the Study of Early Mesopotamian Writing." Pp. 119-135 in A. F. Rainey, et al, eds, *kinattâtu sa darâti*. Raphael Kutcher Memorial Volume. Tel Aviv, 1993. However, it should be noted that Nipur is different. It was not one element of the name of the city, but the name of the entire city. Which was probably more prominent, and could have been known, at least potentially, to a resident of Nippur even if he was not a cuneiform expert. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. As noted, thus in addition to the possibility that this reading of the text likewise indicates that Ezekiel was aware of the use of the cuneiform determinative ki, to which the word **שָֽׁמָּ**ה corresponds. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Unlike the city of ‘Assyria’, for example, which was named after its god, and both names were pronounced the same way: Aššur (kur(.d)*aš-šur*ki), R. Zadok, *Geographical Names According to New- and Late-Babylonian Texts*.(RGTC 8; Wiesbaden, 1985), p. 34–35. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Unlike W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2:* *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel Chapters 25-48,* trans. J. D. Martin (Hermeneia; Philadelphia, 1983), p. 547, who suggests that: “the last sentence of the book of Ezekiel shows how the old tradition of the city of God has forcefully obtained justice for itself against the priestly reform project, which, through the separation of city and temple, has robbed the city of much its dignity” and see P. M. Joyce, “Temple and Worship in Ezekiel 40-48.” in J. Day (ed.) *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel,* Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 482; New York, 2005, pp. 145–163. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)