

SHALEM A West Semitic deity associated with twilight. The Old Testament contains no direct references to the deity Shalem, although indirect references to the name have been proposed.

Shalem in Ugaritic Mythology

The character Shalem is best known from the mythology of non-Israelite West Semitic cultures. The earliest known mention of him is in a second-millennium BC Ugaritic sacred royal marriage text describing the union of the chief god El to two women, likely the goddesses Athirat and Rahmay (*KTU* 1.23; see Wyatt, *Religious Texts*, 324–25). The text states that after El marries the women, he kisses them and they become pregnant. The wives give birth together, producing Shahar and Shalem (*shchr* and *shlm*; *KTU* 1.23.50–55).

The Ugaritic text describes Shahar and Shalem as stars; because Shahar means “dawn,” Shalem has been interpreted as “twilight.” These two deities might also represent the planet Venus, which shines brightly both in the morning and at dusk. The Ugaritic text refers to them as “gracious gods” (*KTU* 1.23.59–75) and describes them as ravenous in their hunger for suckling after being born. As the extant text ends, Shahar and Shalem wander the earth for several years, after which they feast on food and wine. Other Ugaritic texts associate these two gods with the sun goddess Shapsh (*KTU* 1.100.52).

Shalem also appears in the Ugaritic tradition unaccompanied by Shahar, such as when the king must bring an animal sacrifice (likely a heifer) to Shalem on the occasion of the first yearly vintage of wine (*KTU* 1.41.17). Shalem also appears as a single entity on pantheon lists (*KTU* 1.47, 1.118, and *RS* 20.24).

Names That May Be Compared to Shalem

Personal names that include Shalem/Salem are attested as early as the Akkadian and Old Assyrian empires in the second millennium BC (Gelb, *Glossary*, 272–73). However, little

evidence exists to conclude whether all Mesopotamian, Canaanite, and Levantine references to Shalem refer to the same character or deity.

The common Semitic root *sh-l-m* carries a range of meanings relating to the concept of keeping something or someone in a healthy, good condition. Nuanced translations of the verbal form include “to keep peace,” “to make complete,” and “to finish,” and adjectivally it could be translated “complete,” “perfect,” or “undivided.” In other words, personal names that include Shalem likely do not reference the deity at all. For example, Absalom’s name (אַבְשָׁלוֹם, *avshalom*) could mean “my father is healthy” or “my father is at peace,” but the translation “my father is [the god] Shalem” seems unwarranted. The root *sh-l-m* also appears in other Hebrew names in the first millennium BC (Tigay, *You Shall Have*, 79–80).

The name Jerusalem may be translated as “Foundation of Shalem” or “Founded by Shalem,” but the more probable meaning is “Foundation of/by Peace.” However, it could be suggested that a translation of “Foundation of/by Shalem” is supported the association of Melchizedek, “priest of the God Most High” (El-Elyon; Gen 14:18), being associated with Salem, which is equivalent to Jerusalem (see Psa 76:2). In Ugaritic mythology, El is the father of Shalem; thus, a priest of El might logically originate from a city named Salem.

Josephus states that Salem was renamed Jerusalem after Melchizedek’s time (*Ant.* 1.10.2). Egyptian execration texts from the 19th century BC mention Jerusalem (called Rushalimum). If the viewpoint of Jerusalem originally being affiliated with the god Shalem is adopted, then it seems that when David took over the city (2 Sam 5:6–9) he replaced the local deity Shalem with Yahweh.

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